# Business Traveller

DECEMBER 2022/JANUARY 2023 £4.99

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Business Traveller
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COVER IMAGE: FRANCKREPORTER/ISTOCK

Well that's another year gone, and another roller coaster of a ride. The good news is that Covid restrictions seem to have been removed across the vast majority of the world, and we are now just waiting to see what China's next move will be. The bad news, in every sense, is the war in Ukraine, and the appalling suffering it has caused to the people of that country. From an aviation point of view, the war has further hampered connectivity to Asia, with route diversions being necessary for many (but not all) airlines flying from Europe to Asia. We also have high fuel prices, inflation and economic uncertainty to look forward to in 2023.

Is travel just a side show to all this? Well, possibly, but travel connects the world, and if we are to promote understanding and global trade, then it will continue to be essential. Certainly all the predictions I have seen say the resurgence in travel will contine, exceeding the level of pre-Covid passenger numbers some time in 2023 or 2024, and rising to possibly double the current numbers by 2050. There will be many benefits to this, but undoubted costs, too – not least to the environment, which is why in 2023 we will further expand our coverage of sustainability matters.

Until then, enjoy your travels over the next two months, visit businesstraveller.com for the daily updates or sign up to our weekly newsletter, and join the *Business Traveller* Club to ensure you don't miss any of our events. See you in February 2023.

Tom Otley

**Tom Otley** Editorial director

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ILLUSTRATION: BENJAMIN SOUTHAN

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Business Traveller
Awards 2022 (UK)

SINGAPORE AIRLINES

### APRIL HUTCHINSON

April is editor of *TTG Luxury*, the UK's foremost B2B premium travel magazine. She has worked with brand owner TTG Media for 15 years, part of a 27-year career in travel publishing, and is regularly called on as an expert in luxury travel trends. In this issue, she whisks us away to the idyllic Seychelles and Maldives; see page 60.

### LINDSEY GALLOWAY

Lindsey is an American journalist who covers the intersection of travel, business, and policy. She is a regular columnist for *BBC Travel*, authors guidebooks for *Fodor's Travel*, and has produced travel videos for *The New York Times*. As a Colorado native, she provides our readers with updates on the city of Denver on page 26.

### FELICITY COUSINS

Felicity was on the editorial team at *Business Traveller* for six years and has been writing about travel and hotels ever since. She is assistant editor at *Serviced Apartment News* and editor of *Sustainable Hotel News*. On page 88, she rounds up the lounges at Gatwick's South Terminal.

### ALEX MCWHIRTER

Alex has more than 50 years' experience in the business travel industry, including more than 40 years as *Business Traveller's* consumer champion. On page 58, Alex explores the need for competition among rail operators in France, Italy and Spain.

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BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS
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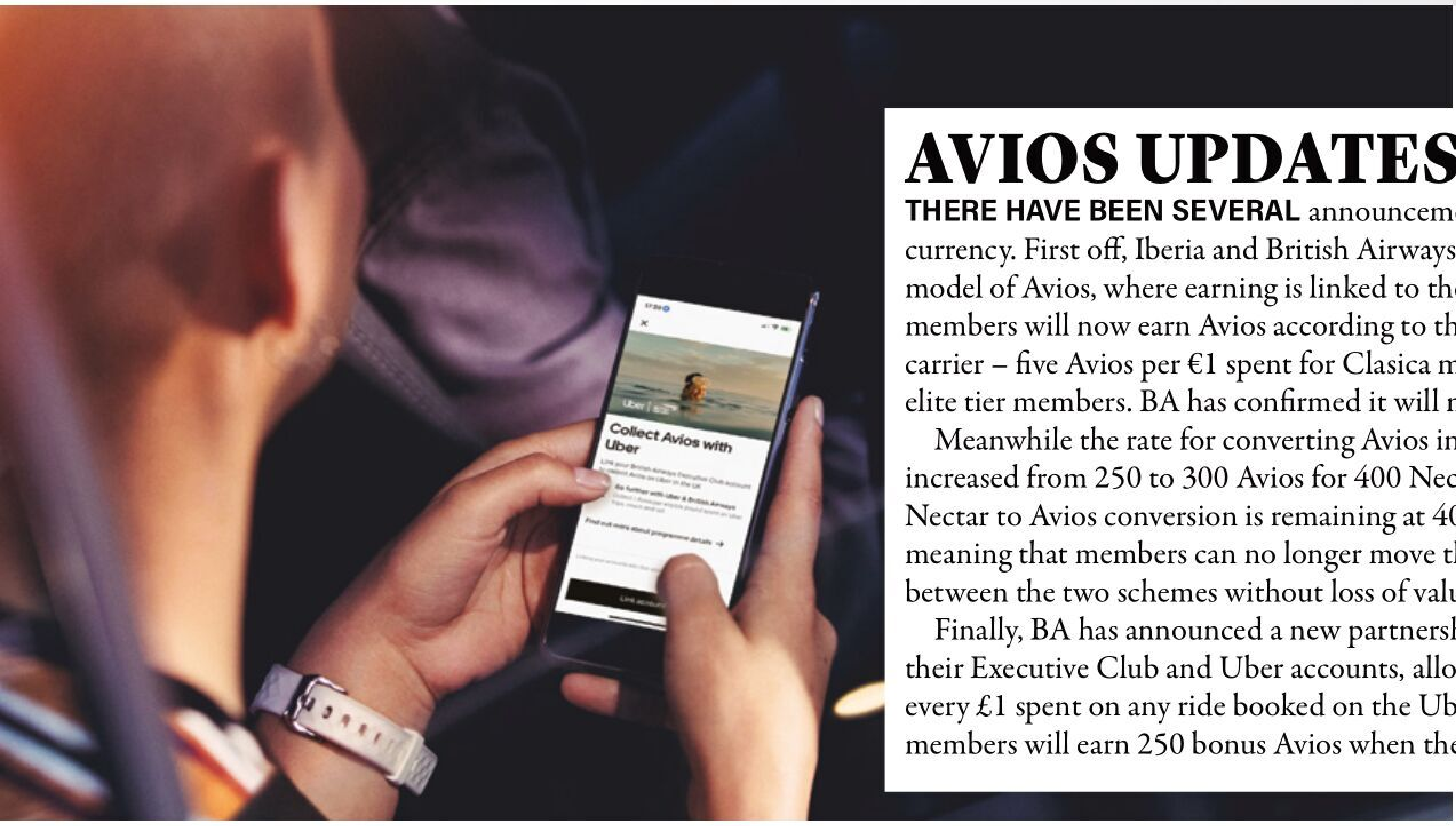


# AVIOS UPDATES

**THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL** announcements concerning the Avios rewards currency. First off, Iberia and British Airways are moving away from the current model of Avios, where earning is linked to the distance flown. Iberia Plus members will now earn Avios according to the number of euros spent with the carrier – five Avios per €1 spent for Clasica members, and eight Avios per €1 for elite tier members. BA has confirmed it will make the switch some time in 2023.

Meanwhile the rate for converting Avios into Nectar points has been increased from 250 to 300 Avios for 400 Nectar points. The key here is that the Nectar to Avios conversion is remaining at 400 Nectar points for 250 Avios – meaning that members can no longer move their balances in either direction between the two schemes without loss of value.

Finally, BA has announced a new partnership with Uber. Members can link their Executive Club and Uber accounts, allowing them to earn one Avios for every £1 spent on any ride booked on the Uber app in the UK. As an incentive members will earn 250 bonus Avios when they link accounts via the Uber app.

# Marriott and Wyndham unveil new extended stay brands

**TWO OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST HOTEL GROUPS** have launched new extended-stay concepts.

Echo Suites Extended Stay by Wyndham is the group's 24th brand, with 120 properties already under development.

The new-build prototype of the economy brand includes 120 rooms across single and two-queen studio suites, with facilities including a fitness centre and 24-hour guest laundry.

Meanwhile Apartments by Marriott Bonvoy will be positioned in the upper-upscale and luxury segments, with units featuring a separate living room and bedroom, full kitchen, and in-unit washer and dryer. The brand is expected to launch in the US and Canada.

ECHO SUITES

# BRITISH AIRWAYS RETURNS TO TOKYO

**BRITISH AIRWAYS HAS RESUMED FLIGHTS** to Japan for the first time in 12 months, with flight BA7 from London Heathrow arriving at Tokyo Haneda airport on November 14.

Japan has lifted restrictions on international travellers, meaning triple vaccinated visitors no longer need a Covid-19 test, and don't have to be part of a package tour.

BA's daily flights are being operated by B787-9 Dreamliner aircraft, departing London at 1145 and arriving into Tokyo at 1025 the following day, with the return leg leaving the Japanese capital at 0945, landing back into London at 1525.

Return fares start from £610 in economy, £1,708 in premium economy and £3,141 in business class.

HARRY WINSTON
CHANEL
MOUSSAIEFF

## SCRAPPING OF PLANNED TAX-FREE SHOPPING FOR OVERSEAS VISITORS "A SPECTACULAR OWN GOAL"

**THE DIGITAL, CULTURE,** Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee has published a new report warning that recent government decisions are hindering UK tourism's post-pandemic recovery.

In October, chancellor Jeremy Hunt scrapped plans for the return of tax-free shopping for overseas visitors, just weeks after the scheme was announced in the doomed "mini budget".

The government said that scrapping the scheme "is worth around £2 billion a year", but the DCMS Committee said the decision was "short-sighted and incredibly damaging". Julian Knight, chair of the committee, added: "The scrapping of tax-free shopping for overseas visitors has been a spectacular own goal from the government, with the subsequent on-again off-again flip-flopping symptomatic of an approach that lacks thought and recognition of the huge importance of retail to inbound tourism".

## On a ritual basis

**AMSTERDAM-BASED BRAND**, Rituals Cosmetics, has launched a new range of fragrances designed to "help soothe the travellers' mind". The new Comfort line comprises Suede Vanilla, Smooth Violet and Cotton Blossom scents, with a range of fragrance sticks, scented candles, room sprays, cartridges, car perfume, hand washes and a hand balm.

BLACK OUDH
RITUALS...

## Accor and Expedia to launch points-earning flight and hotel packages

**ACCOR HAS PARTNERED WITH EXPEDIA GROUP** to launch a new 'Flight + Hotel' site, which will allow customers to "seamlessly add flights to their hotel stay".

For members of Accor's ALL loyalty programme it will mean points can be earned on both the hotel and flight portion of packages purchased through the new site. Expedia said that the site will first launch in Australia, followed by the UK, France and Germany.

Expedia pointed to two pieces of research to explain the move – the first showing that over half of travellers state that it is "more important to travel with their loyalty providers than before the pandemic", and the second showing that package customers cancel 75 per cent less, stay twice as long and book twice as early compared to non-package travellers.

IAN WALDIE; YONGYUAN; RAYLIPSCOMBE/ISTOCK

# HILTON NEW YORK TIMES SQUARE REOPENS AFTER TWO-YEAR CLOSURE

**HILTON HAS REOPENED ITS HOTEL** on New York's 42nd Street close to Times Square, following a change in ownership earlier this year.

The 478-room hotel features a fitness centre with Peloton bikes, and the 21st floor Restaurant Above for buffet breakfast. Pinnacle Bar is also set to open later this year overlooking Times Square.

Meanwhile Hilton recently announced plans to debut new lifestyle brand, Tempo by Hilton, in the city next year.

The 661-room hotel will be located in TSX Broadway, a purpose-built 46-storey entertainment and hotel tower at 47th Street and Broadway, which will also house The Palace Theatre, a permanent outdoor stage and the "first and only full-building LED facade system in New York".

# Air Canada unveils raft of service upgrades across all cabins

**AIR CANADA HAS ANNOUNCED** a number of product enhancements, including revamped dining options, new amenity kits, and Porsche transfers at Vancouver airport.

Economy passengers on international flights are being offered a new menu, including a hot entrée created by Montréal chef Jérôme Ferrer and a separate dessert service.

Meanwhile passengers in Air Canada's Premium Rouge premium economy cabin now get free wifi, which the carrier says is a first for a Canadian airline – and from 2023 Air Canada will increase its IFE content by over 25 per cent, including the introduction of live TV.

There are also new Acqua di Parma amenity bags for Signature (business) class customers on international flights, and those travelling on eligible services connecting through Vancouver International airport will now be transferred between flights by an electric Porsche vehicle.

ACQUA DI PARMA

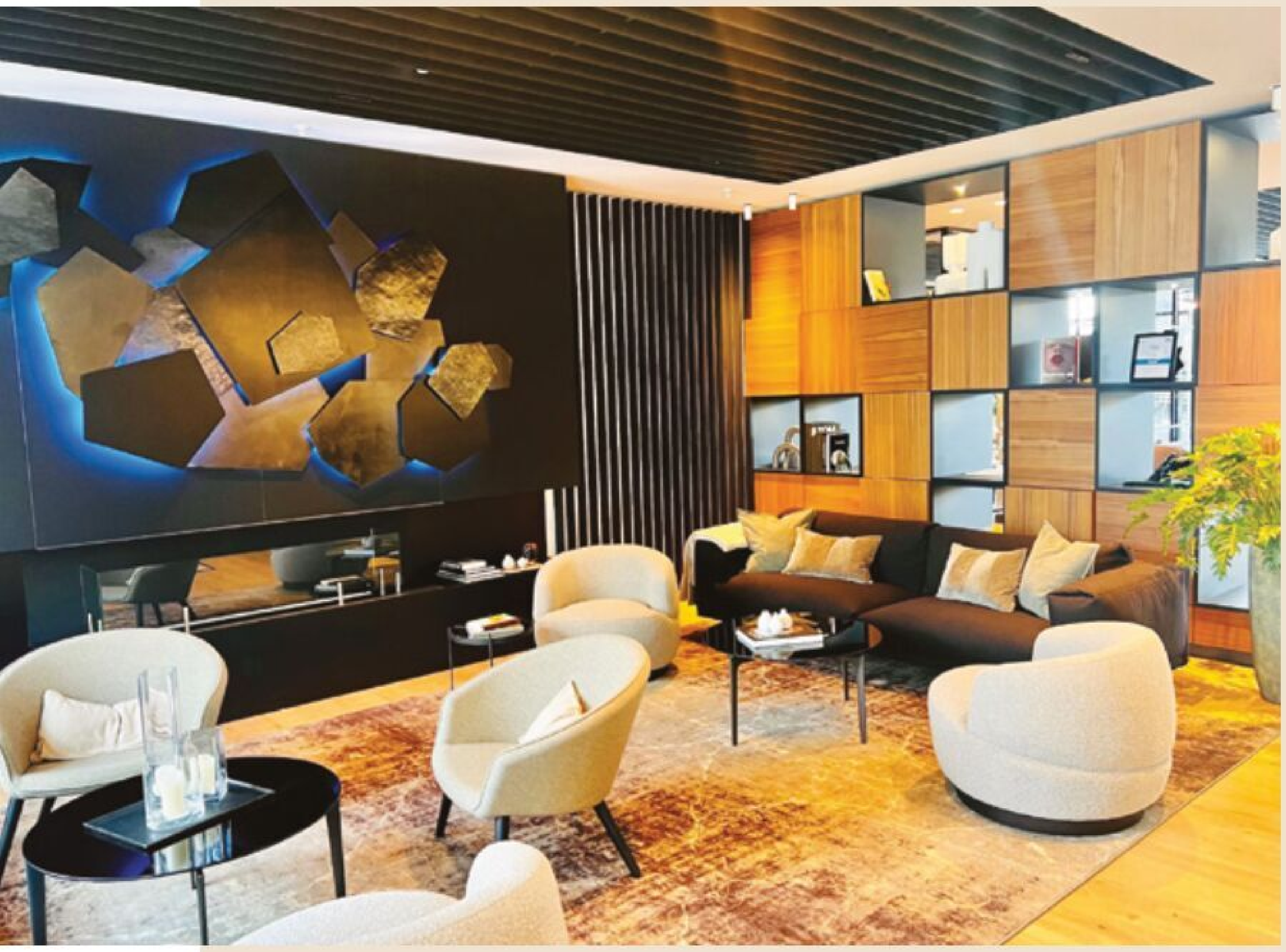
# PRIORITY PASS INCREASES VISIT PRICES AND PREMIUM MEMBERSHIP FEES

**PRIORITY PASS HAS ANNOUNCED** increases to its annual charges for Standard Plus and Prestige membership, as well as a hike in visit fees.

Members (and guests) previously paid £20 for entry, outside of inclusive entitlements, but this has now increased to £24.

Annual fees for Standard Plus members (who benefit from ten free visits per year) also rose on December 1 – from £189 per year to £229 – while Prestige members (who get unlimited lounge usage but pay for guest entry) now pay £419 per year, up from £339. The charge for Standard membership (which does not include any free entries) remains at £69.

Members of The Club by Business Traveller can get up to 20 per cent off Priority Pass annual membership fees – for more information, visit businesstravellerclub.com.



# AC Hotels by Marriott debuts in Scotland

**MARRIOTT HAS OPENED** the first property under its lifestyle AC Hotels brand in Scotland.

The four-storey AC Hotel by Marriott Inverness is the largest hotel in the Scottish city. It is located on the banks of the River Ness on Glebe Street, overlooking the Kessock Bridge and within walking distance of the city's bars, restaurants and Eden Court Theatre.

Features include 191 rooms, an AC Lounge with a fireplace, an all-day European restaurant with a riverside terrace, and a 24-hour fitness centre.

The hotel is managed by Hotel Co 51, which also operates Moxy Edinburgh Fountainbridge, Courtyard by Marriott SEC in Glasgow and Moxy London Excel, among others.

AC Hotels currently operates over 210 hotels in 30 countries and territories, with recent openings including the brand's first Australian property in Melbourne.

# First Chase Sapphire airport lounge opens at Hong Kong International

**THE FIRST AIRPORT LOUNGE** by JPMorgan Chase has opened in Hong Kong in conjunction with Airport Dimensions.

The Chase Sapphire Lounge by The Club is located in the West Hall of Hong Kong International's Terminal 1, on level seven of the departures hall close to Gate 40.

Features include fresh and seasonal dining options, signature cocktails, local beer and a curated wine list, as well as free wifi and plenty of power outlets. An "in-lounge digital experience" enables guests to order food and drink, as well as access digital media.

Readers can access the lounge with a Priority Pass or Lounge Key membership, while Sapphire Reserve cardmembers can use the complimentary Priority Pass membership that is an existing benefit on the Sapphire Reserve card.

BEVERAGE
GRAB &

# United opens grab-and-go Club Fly lounge at Denver airport

**UNITED AIRLINES HAS** debuted its new Club Fly lounge concept within the recently opened Concourse B expansion at Denver airport.

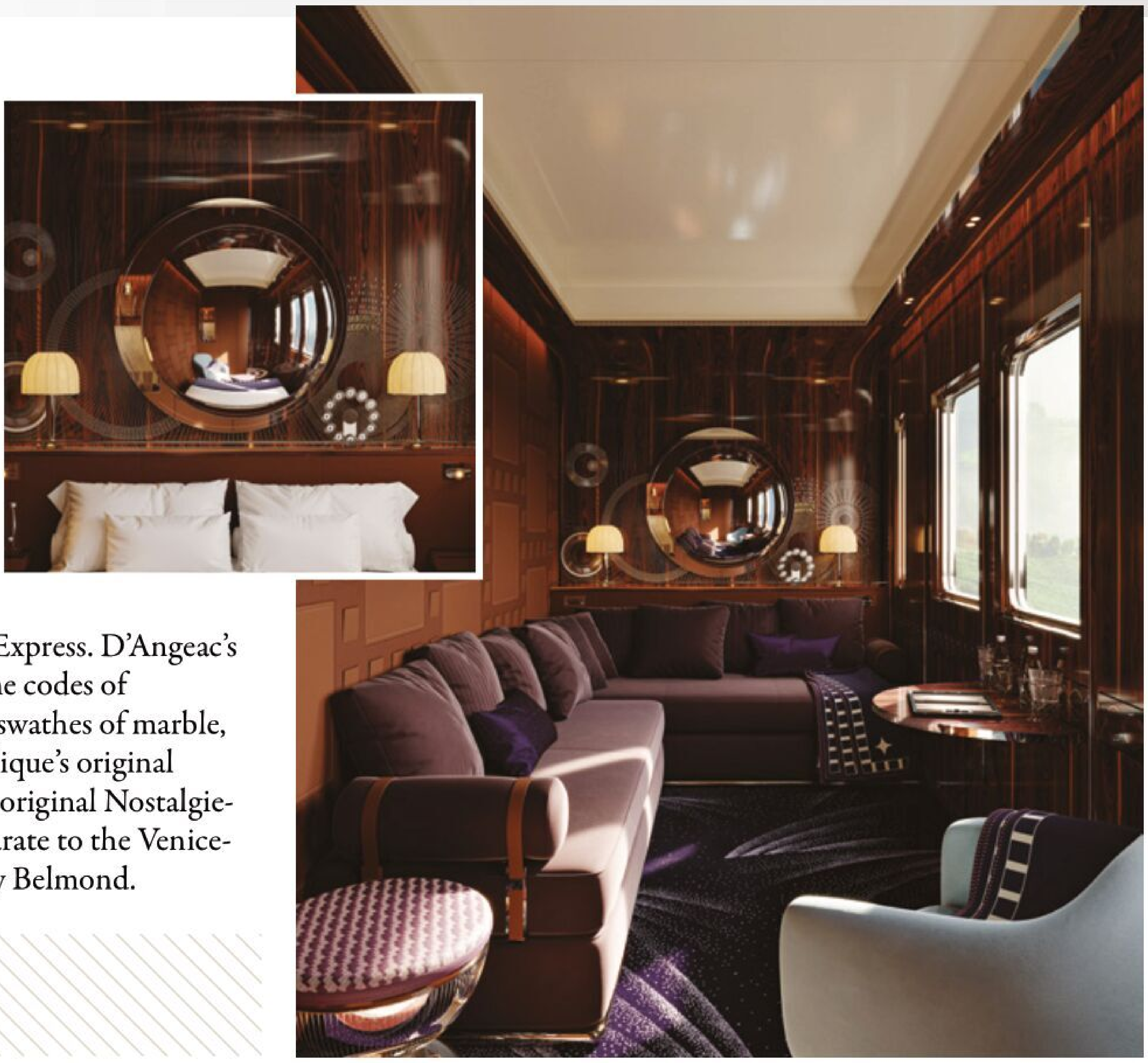
Described as a "grab-and-go" lounge, the facility is accessed via automated gates where eligible travellers scan their boarding pass.

Inside, guests can help themselves to Illy coffee and non-alcoholic drinks from a self-service bar, as well as "premium food options curated with an on-the-go flyer in-mind, such as sandwiches, salads and wraps, yogurt, vegetables, fruit and more".

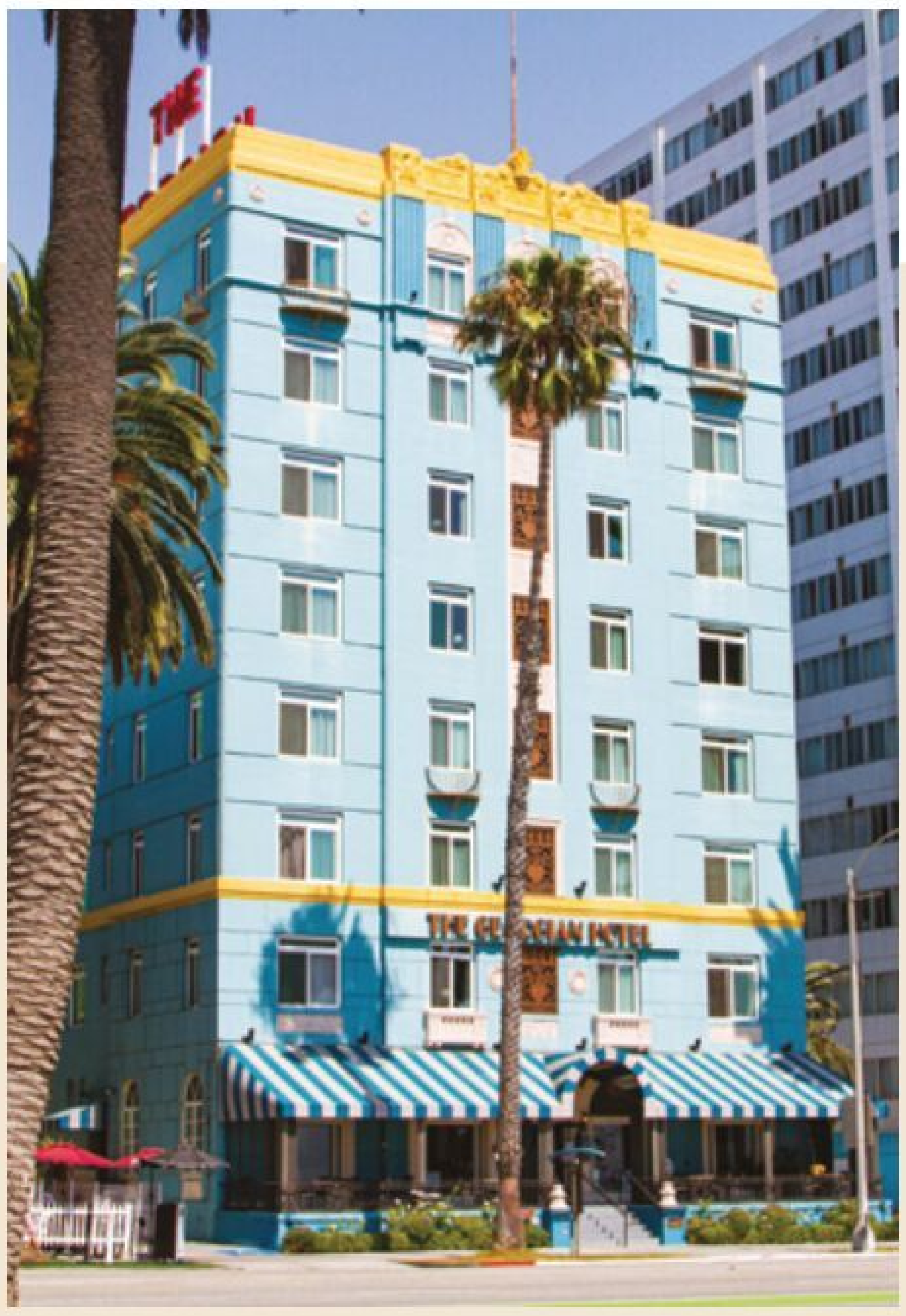
The concept follows a survey of Mileage Plus members, which showed that over half of visitors "like to take food or drinks to-go".

The lounge occupies a smaller footprint than a traditional United Club, and has been inspired by a ski lodge, with art and furnishings sourced from local artists and companies. It is open to United Club members, as well as those flying internationally in premium cabins.

# Interiors revealed for the future Orient Express



**THOSE PLANNING A TRIP** on the forthcoming Orient Express, set to return in 2024, can now get a sneak peek at the interiors. A set of 17 carriages from the Nostalgie-Istanbul-Orient-Express incarnation of the train, dating from the 1920s and 1930s, are being restored by architect Maxime d'Angeac with support from hotel group Accor and Orient Express. D'Angeac's design is inspired by the 1920s yet "created with the codes of contemporary luxury". Expect various green hues, swathes of marble, embroidered curtains and nooks adorned with Lalique's original 'blackbirds and grapes' panels, recovered from the original Nostalgie-Istanbul-Orient Express cars. Note that this is separate to the Venice-Simplon-Orient-Express brand, which is owned by Belmond.



## Santa Monica Dream

**THE HISTORIC GEORGIAN HOTEL** in Santa Monica is relaunching in January 2023 following its acquisition by BLVD hospitality in 2020. The Georgian Hotel, otherwise known as Santa Monica's First Lady, opened in 1933 and was one of the first high-rises on Ocean Avenue, welcoming Hollywood stars including Charlie Chaplin and Marilyn Monroe over the years. London and Los Angeles-based firm Fettle has restored its 84 guest rooms and 28 suites and added two new private meeting and dining spaces as well as a gallery showcasing works by international artist. Features include Art Deco furniture, ornate lighting and rare imported Italian marble. Additional details regarding the F&B programme are expected in the coming months.

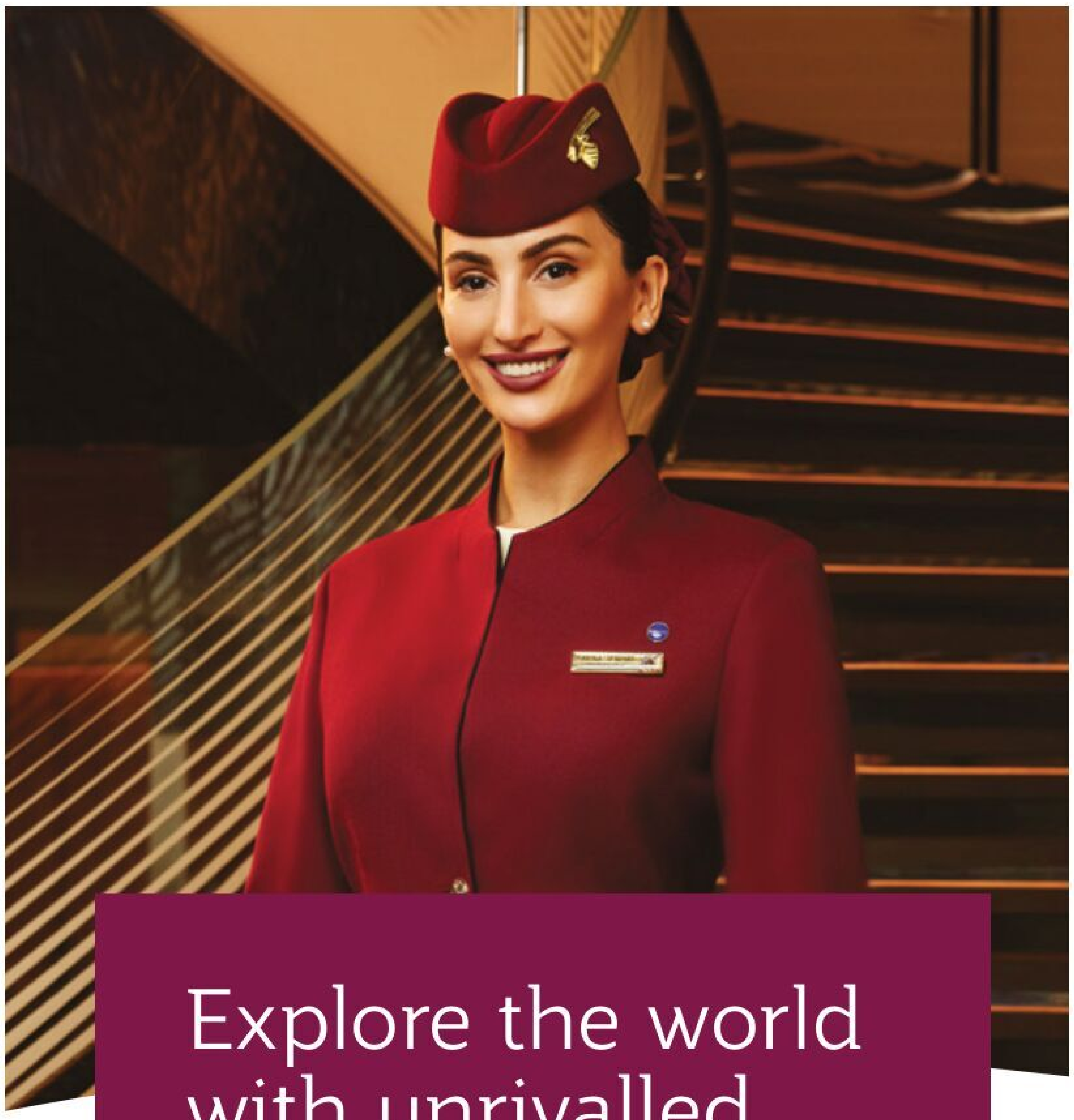
MAXIME D'ANGEAC AND MARTIN DARZACQ FOR ORIENT EXPRESS, ACCOR

## LOST IN TRANSLATION

**Idioms from around the world that have us scratching our heads. This issue, it's a Norwegian expression.**

**Phrase:** Det er ugler i mosen
**Literally:** There are owls in the bog
**Meaning:** To have suspicions

AIRLINE
OF THE YEAR
SKYTRAX
2022
QATAR



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

# HILTON'S OCEAN CLEANUP

**TWO HILTON PROPERTIES** have received their second Green Globe certification this month for outstanding sustainable initiatives.

The Hilton Seychelles Labriz Resort and Spa, in Silhouette National Marine Park, has teamed up with the Island Conservation Society (ICS) to offer guests the chance to participate in reef and sea cleanups, exploring the undersea world while helping to keep the waters clear of debris.

Hilton Seychelles Northolme Resort and Spa meanwhile has collaborated with the Marine Conservation Seychelles Society to develop a Coral Reef Restoration programme aimed at protecting and restoring the remaining reef. Guests are invited on snorkelling tours to learn about the restoration process and adopt a piece of coral, which can include Acropora and Pocillopora – both of which have been negatively affected by the rising sea temperatures caused by global warming.

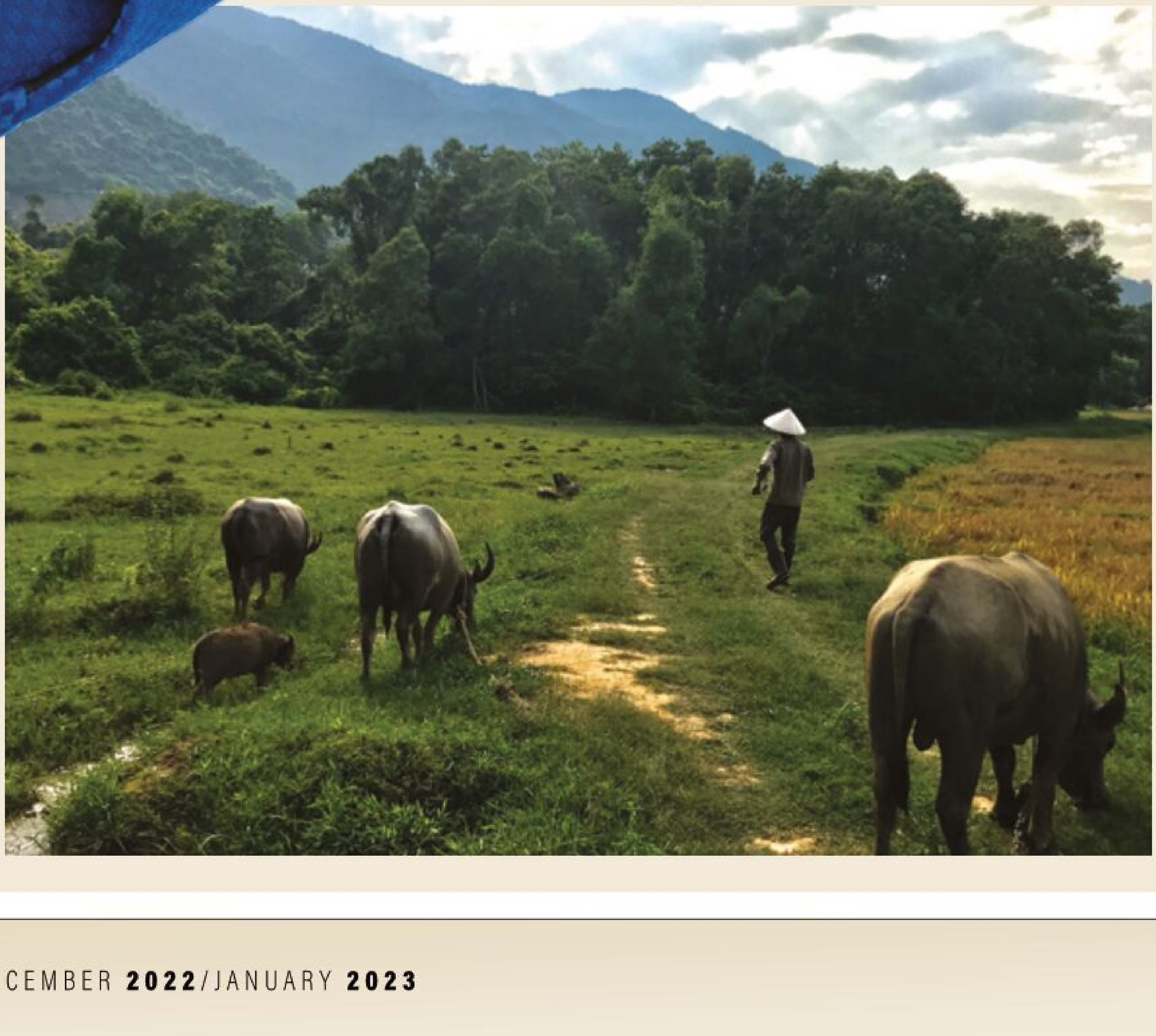
# ANA UPCYCLES SLIPPERS

**ALL NIPPON AIRWAYS** is transforming discarded aircraft seat covers into slippers as part of an upcycling initiative to reduce waste. The dark blue slippers are crafted from seat covers that had become faded, torn or otherwise unsuitable for aircraft use. The products are handmade by craftsmen at a factory in Yamagata prefecture, which produces the largest number of slippers in Japan. Moulding, cutting, and sewing are all done by hand to take out the best of the fabric and assure the highest quality.

Due to limited availability, the airline will begin by selling 50 pairs of slippers within Japan only, but there are plans to introduce various types of slippers with different patterns.

# ECO-FRIENDLY VILLAS IN VIETNAM

**THE HUE ECOLODGE** in Vietnam's former capital, Hue, offers just 15 thatched villas set within lush, private tropical gardens which are overflowing with seasonal fruits. Guests have the option of sampling organically grown vegetables at the hotel's onsite restaurant or taking a tour of the local area to experience the authentic charms first hand.



# EDIBLE GOLF COURSES AND TREE PLANTING

**WHETHER TO CUT YOUR GRASS** or let it grow for the birds and bees is a debate many gardeners have. The Laguna Lang Co in Vietnam has a novel alternative – leave it to water buffalo. The course, which was designed by Sir Nick Faldo, incorporates rice fields, while the wider resort has a ban on single-use plastics and has just installed its own water bottling plant to eliminate plastic water bottles and utilise reusable glass bottles. Other key green initiatives include a tree-planting programme to increase tree cover while providing a new income source for underprivileged communities in Lang Co, trash collecting activities, sponsorship of underprivileged youths through the resort's Seedlings Mentorship Program, and sustainability workshops in local communities.

# DUSIT PARTNERS WITH ORGANIC RICE FARMS

**DUSIT HOTELS AND RESORTS** has become the first hotel chain in Thailand to offer 100 per cent organic rice across its entire portfolio of properties nationwide. Embracing a 'farm-to-table' concept, Dusit has selected four farming communities to work with, including collectives in Surin and Sisaket provinces. Driven by Dusit International's food business unit, Dusit Foods, and the company's Sustainability Committee, the initiative sees Dusit work directly with farm collectives and provide support in everything from quality control to training, packaging and distribution, helping to support sustainable development.

# Nose-to-table

**AIR ASTANA IS UPCYCLING** used aircraft parts and decommissioned spares from B767 and A320 aircraft into furniture and interior decorations. The pieces, which originated as nose cones, luggage compartment lids and seat frames, have been transformed into items such as tables and chairs. There are also backpacks sewn from cabin upholstery fabrics which are suitable for both indoor and outdoor use with the ability to withstand a variety of temperature and climatic conditions.

**65%**

of British shoppers have sustainability front of mind when shopping

**41%**

prefer to shop locally rather than online (reducing the carbon footprint associated with deliveries driven by e-commerce)

**45%**

of 18-34 year olds would spend more on an item that had better environmental credentials

*(Survey of 2,000 UK consumers from American Express, November 2022)*

# BA FUELS ITS FUTURE

**BRITISH AIRWAYS HAS A NEW** sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) partnership – this time with Lanzajet and Nova Pangaea Technologies. The aim is to develop cost-effective SAF for commercial use in the UK through Project Speedbird. This would transform agricultural and wood waste into 102 million litres of SAF per year, and become the UK's first SAF facility utilising these feedstocks. British Airways says that construction could begin as early as 2023 and the facility, which is planned to be built in North East England, could be producing SAF by 2026. The SAF produced would reduce CO2 emissions, on a net lifecycle basis, by 230,000 tonnes a year, which is equivalent to the emissions from approximately 26,000 British Airways domestic flights.

Our Journey to better.
For our planet, people & communities
South Western Railway

# NEW ROUTE: LONDON HEATHROW-KIGALI

**RWANDAIR HAS LAUNCHED DIRECT FLIGHTS** from Kigali to London Heathrow. The African airline had been operating thrice-weekly flights to Heathrow via Brussels since 2017, but launched the nonstop service in November to cater to demand.

The new four-times-weekly service is operated by an A330 aircraft, configured with economy and business class cabins.

Flights depart Kigali on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday at 2335, arriving in London at 0620 the following day. The return flight departs London at 2030 on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, and arrives in Kigali at 0700 the following day.

## INFLIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

### Our tips to make time fly by

CHANGES
with Annie Macmanus

**LISTEN: *Changes with Annie Macmanus***
The Irish DJ, well-known for her work with *BBC* Radio 1 and live DJ sets, chats to artists, writers and musicians about big changes they have overcome in this weekly podcast. Recent episodes include discussions with Professor Brian Cox and Glastonbury Festival organiser Emily Eavis. Free to download.

**READ: *Spare, Prince Harry The Duke of Sussex***
The memoir published on January 10 made headlines in October with its bombshell title, playing on the term 'the heir and the spare'.

PRINCE HARRY
SPARE

Penguin promises "raw, unflinching honesty" from the prince in his story about life within the royal family, with an audiobook read by the author released on the same date. Donations from the proceeds will support two British charities: Sentebale and WellChild.
Penguin; £14

**WATCH: *Glass Onion***
Daniel Craig returns as detective Benoit Blanc in the follow-up to Rian Johnson's fun *Knives Out* whodunit. The sequel takes place at a private estate on a Greek island and features a new cast of suspects, played by the likes of Edward Norton, Kathryn Hahn, Kate Hudson and Leslie Odom Jr. Your guess is as good as ours. The film was screened at cinemas for a week in November but is available on Netflix from December 23.

Glass Onion
Knives Out
NETFLIX | DECEMBER 23

JENNIFER SOPHIE/ISTOCK

## INMARSAT REVEALS PASSENGERS' ATTITUDES TO INFLIGHT CONNECTIVITY

**97%**
use their personal devices when flying

**83%**
think wifi should be free on long-haul flights (only 47% for short-haul)

**82%**
would rebook with an airline offering quality inflight wifi

**79%**
connect to onboard wifi when it's available

**77%**
said inflight wifi is important

**51%**
want more charging ports onboard

**47%**
say paying for wifi may put them off connecting

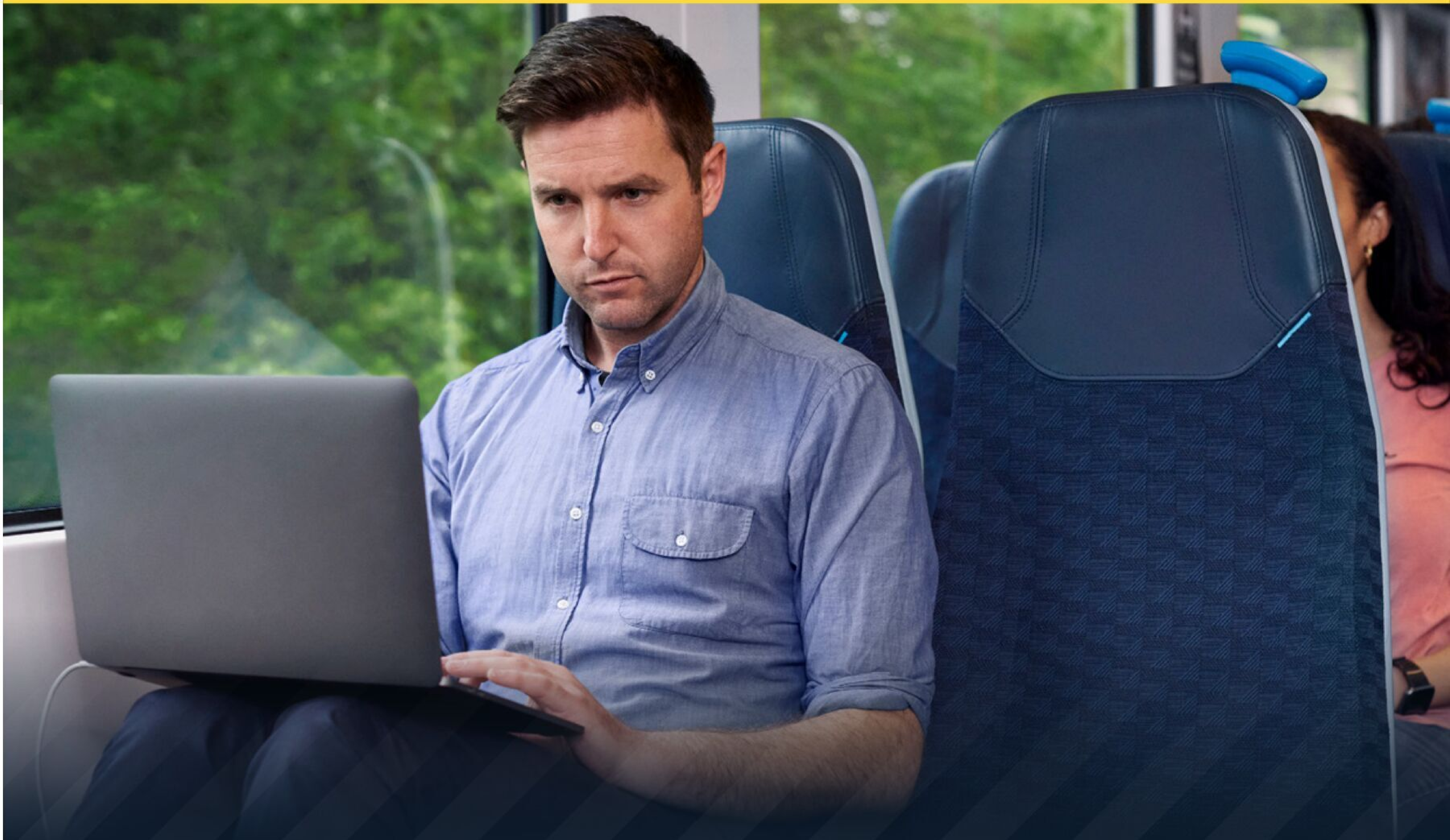
**38%**
would watch ads when connected

**35%**
want real-time flight updates throughout their journey

**30%**
would pay more for unlimited social media usage

**25%**
would pay more for unlimited downloads

*Source: Passenger Experience Tracker 2022, conducted by Censuswide on behalf of Inmarsat in August-September 2022*



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# AIR MILES

**SACHA JAFRI** is a globally celebrated contemporary British artist, known for his humanitarian work.

**TELL US ABOUT THE JOURNEY OF HUMANITY?**
My work is always driven by that notion of reconnecting humanity. *The Journey of Humanity* is the world's largest painting on canvas [created in Dubai at Atlantis, The Palm]. It took 11 months, with 22 hours of work per day, and raised a lot of money for charity [it sold for £45 million at auction]. It had an extraordinary impact.

**WHY IS CHARITY SO IMPORTANT TO YOU?**
My work is powerful, magical and has the potential of legacy when it is connected to humanity, either in monetary ways or building awareness for various causes in our world. It helps drive me and inspire me as an artist. I'm particularly interested in giving kids a chance and also sustainability, because, without that, we are not going to have a planet.

**WHAT'S THE ART MAZE?**
UNESCO commissioned me to create 50 paintings of its World Heritage sites for its 50th anniversary. That became an art maze formation that people could walk through. I wanted to create something after Covid that reminds us of the beauty within our natural world. We're becoming obsessed with the metaverse and digital creations. Our next generation has lost a connection to our natural world. *The Art Maze* is a beautiful journey through our heritage. That project can keep growing.

**AN EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE COLLABORATION WITH LUFTHANSA.**
Yes, I painted 20 of my World Heritage Site paintings on the fuselage of a decommissioned A320 aircraft. This is a plane that has done millions of miles and has connected people. I was also looking at sustainability and how we can continue the life of this plane and turn it into a work of art. We suspended the pieces from the ceiling for the 50th anniversary of UNESCO at their headquarters in Paris. It was really beautiful.

**DID THE PANDEMIC BOOST CREATIVITY?**
Covid was an opportunity for creativity to be more intention-filled, less agenda-driven. Creation for creation's sake. Beautiful things were being created for the right reasons.

**FAVOURITE GALLERY?**
Musée d'Orsay. I'm a fan of Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Cézanne and Van Gogh. Painters that evoked emotion through their work.

**MOST REWARDING TRAVEL EXPERIENCE?**
An elephant sanctuary in Sri Lanka.

**AND MOST CHALLENGING?**
In my early twenties I travelled from the UK to Siberia and back without a credit card or cash. I came up with creative ways of travelling, eating and having shelter for free, such as painting and roller blading tricks. It was extreme but very rewarding.

**DREAM DESTINATION?**
Iceland.

**INDISPENSABLE TRAVEL GADGETS?**
A sketchpad, pen and roller blades.

**IFE PICK?**
Getting emotional during a movie and then getting very creative and writing my ideas and thoughts for about two hours. Then I'll pass out.
*Visit businesstraveller.com for the full interview.*

2022 GETTY IMAGES; ANA TORFS; JIM MARSHALL PHOTOGRAPHY LLC; VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

# *AMAN OPENS THE JAZZ CLUB IN NEW YORK*

**AMAN NEW YORK** has opened a jazz club at the Crown Building, accessible by secret entrance on West 56th Street off Fifth Avenue. The 280 sqm venue designed by Jean-Michel Gathy is inspired by the speakeasies of the Prohibition era, and features a 1962 Steinway baby grand piano at its centre, advanced acoustic technologies from Meyer Sound Laboratories, and 150 loudspeakers and microphones. Performances are on Tuesday to Saturday evenings from 7pm-10pm, followed by DJ sets from 10pm to 2am, with six-time Grammy Award nominee Brian Newman filling the shoes of creative director. Snacks include seared A5 wagyu and a signature truffled grilled cheese sandwich, and cocktails are inspired by 12 of Aman's global destinations.

# SKI SEASON

**THE SWISS ALPS** welcomes Faern, a new collection of lifestyle alpine resorts, this winter. The name is a combination of the German word 'feiern' which means 'to celebrate' and the English 'fern', and the collection debuts with two ski-in ski-out properties in Arosa and Crans-Montana. Both will include communal areas such as a games room with a pool table, board games and cards, and a cinema room showcasing classic films. There will also be curated experiences on offer, including picnics for the slopes, Strava-curated skiing routes, and kite-making workshops – or for the night owls, après ski DJ sets paired with craft beers and cheese boards.

Business Traveller

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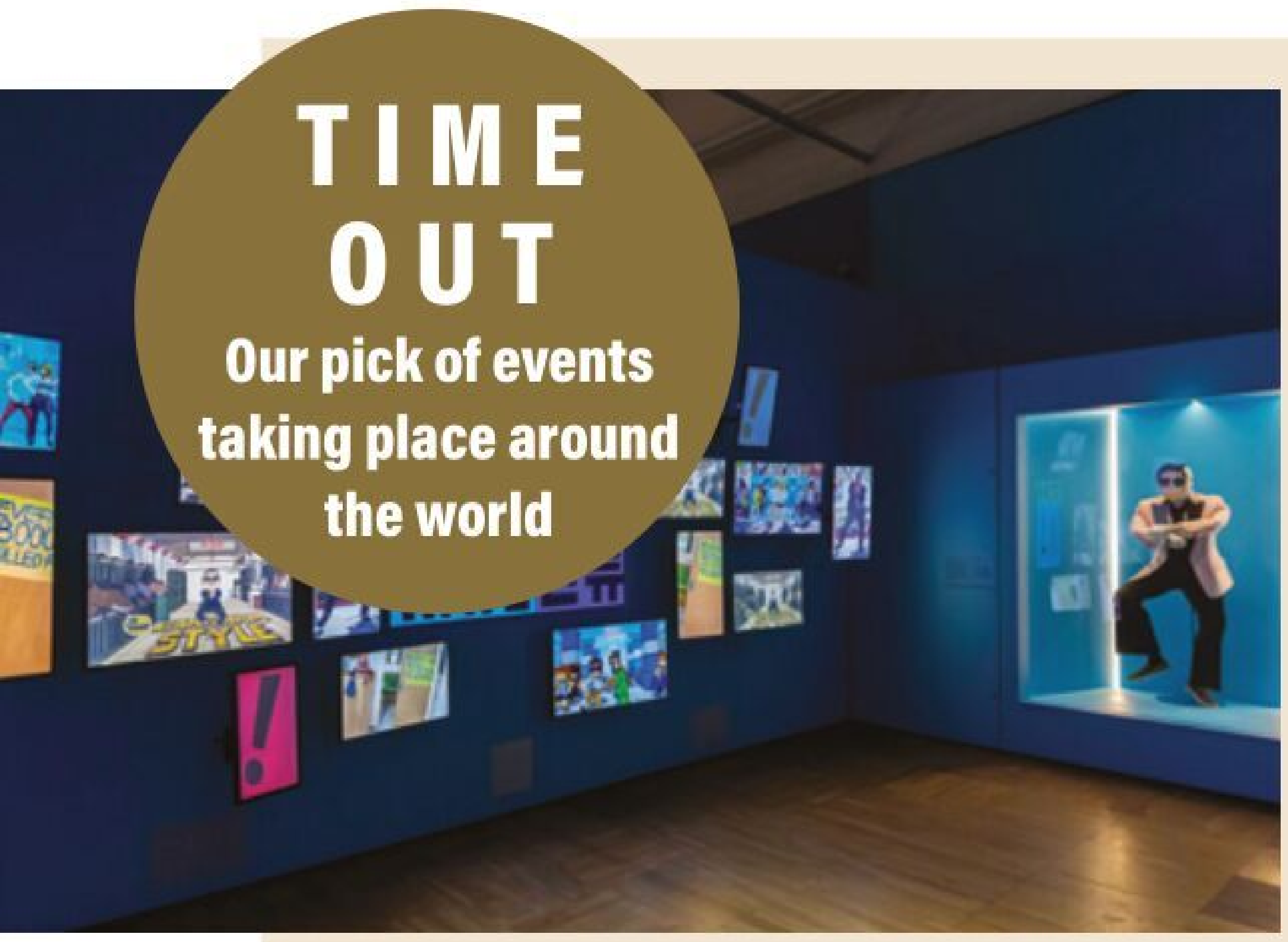
# WIN A LUXURY TWO NIGHT STAY IN A TUSCAN FARMHOUSE

***BUSINESS TRAVELLER*** has partnered with Cipresso e Pietra, a sustainable luxury bed and breakfast in southern Tuscany, to offer one lucky reader and guest a two-night stay in one of its suites. Cipresso e Pietra is a tranquil adults-only escape in a renovated 19th century farmhouse, close to Lucignano, a small medieval village overlooking the Valdichiana.

## TIME OUT

**Our pick of events taking place around the world**



**DOMESTIC:** HALLYU! THE KOREAN WAVE, LONDON, UNTIL JUNE 25, 2023
London's Victoria and Albert Museum showcases the colourful popular culture of South Korea in its latest exhibition, with around 200 objects and digital displays across the creative industries of cinema, drama, music, fashion and beauty – from the Oscar-winning *Parasite* and Netflix series *Squid Game* to K-Pop music.

**SHORT HAUL:** FINIS TERRAE ART WALK, ANTWERP, UNTIL FEBRUARY 26
Contemporary Antwerp art gallery, Geukens and De Vil, is putting on a large-scale art tour themed around 'our planet,' and specifically the impact of global emergencies from the climate crisis to rising extremism. Visitors to the Belgian city will encounter works by 50 contemporary Belgian artists at 13 locations during the walk, including stops at the garden of the Cathedral of Our Lady and the Hendrik Conscience Library.

**LONG HAUL:** ROLLING STONES 1972: PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIM MARSHALL, LOS ANGELES, UNTIL JUNE 2023
Fans of the Rolling Stones will want to head to the Grammy Museum to check out backstage scenes and performance stills taken by photojournalist Jim Marshall during the rock n' roll band's California leg of the tour following the release of *Exile on Main Street*.

# Join the debate

*READERS SHARE FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCES AND IDEAS*

**BUSINESSTRAVELLER.COM/FORUM**

## I'D BE INTERESTED IN OPINIONS ON THIS SCENARIO

**➜ FDOS**

*You are travelling on a full-fare C class ticket, sitting in the last row of business class on an A320. The flight is sold out in all classes. You boarded early to find space in the overhead locker for a computer bag, with a very expensive laptop inside, and a second piece of hand luggage containing delicate teaching equipment – both within the agreed hand luggage allowance. These items are important, so you wish to keep them in as controlled a space as possible on public transport.*

*Just before the doors close, a family of four board to occupy seats 1A to 1F, with roll-aboard cases and other hand luggage. The cabin crew member wakes you up (you've flown overnight on a narrowbody and are very tired) to ask if you mind your hand luggage being moved to the floor under your seat to accommodate the family's luggage (which seems to be more than the allowance).*

*What do you say? After all, it's not the passenger's fault there isn't enough space for everyone's hand luggage, but what service level should you expect on a very expensive ticket?*

**➜ MARTYNSINCLAIR**

*Cabin crew deciding to fill overhead bins in premium cabins with their overnight bags causes additional limitations on space. The only reason I try to board first when travelling club is to fit my bag carefully in the bin over my seat. The price of the ticket is irrelevant; the problem is caused by gate staff not enforcing cabin baggage rules.*

**➜ CATHAYLOYALIST2**

*I would have politely declined. I always board early to ensure locker space is available above my seat. With this type of request, it is down to how the question is asked and how the response is framed. If I only had a rucksack, it might be less of an issue – as long as the rucksack wasn't stored halfway down the plane. What does irritate me is economy class passengers sticking their bags in business class lockers.*

**➜ GIVINGUPBA**

*Personally I always do what cabin crew ask me to do whether I like it or not. I am sure they have good reasons for asking.*

**➜ SIMONROWBERRY**

*I come across the same issue when seated in row 1. I travel with a small, purpose-built camera roll bag. The equipment inside costs around £10,000 and some of the pieces would be hard to replace. Like FDOS, I always aim to board as soon as possible, so I can stow this valuable gear overhead.*

*On several occasions I have not been able to board early and found people have ignored the reserved notice on the first row bin. It can be incredibly frustrating as the crew have to place the bag wherever there is a free locker, which might be several rows behind.*

*The worst I saw was on a Finnair flight a while back. I was seated in 1A and was hand luggage free. The guy in 2A boarded after me and used the overhead locker marked for 'front row use only'. An elderly lady then boarded, who had a clear disability and mobility issues. She was in 1C and had a single roll bag. I tried to help her stow her bag into the overhead, but it was already full with the guy in 2A's gear. I politely asked if he would mind moving his things to the bin above his seat so the lady could use it. His response was to tell both me and the lady to "Foxtrot Oscar" because, as he put it: "my company has paid a lot for this flight and I'll do what I want." In the end, the cabin crew told him to move it. I had a few choice words with him once we had disembarked in Helsinki…*

> **The price of the ticket is irrelevant; the problem is caused by gate staff not enforcing the rules**

**➜ FLYBOY18**

*From a crew perspective we try to spread our bags throughout the aircraft. If you have a better suggestion, please let me know.*

*We don't know how much you paid for your ticket or what expensive items you have in your bags. Just explain that the item is expensive or fragile and pretty much all crew will move on to find another solution. Baggage is the biggest pain for us. Ground staff that have been outsourced rarely enforce baggage restrictions and thus leave us to be the bad guy. We can only do what we can with what we have. While it's no fault of the passenger, it's also no fault of the crew.*

**➜ ALANORTON1**

*I tend to agree with the announcements on US domestic flights: "Place larger pieces in the overhead locker and smaller pieces under the seat in front of you".*

*On my last short-haul flight, a passenger placed their hand luggage under their seat – not the seat in front of them – which meant in my foot space. Hopefully not a trend where people feel entitled to more foot space at the expense of the passenger behind them.*

**➜ DAVIDSMITH2**

*I am a regular on the Accra-London flight and it is full of people with excess hand luggage, despite being entitled to two 23kg check-in bags. This may be because they are using every possible kilo, or because it usually takes at least an hour to wait for baggage to materialise on the belt. And in my experience at Heathrow – even longer.*

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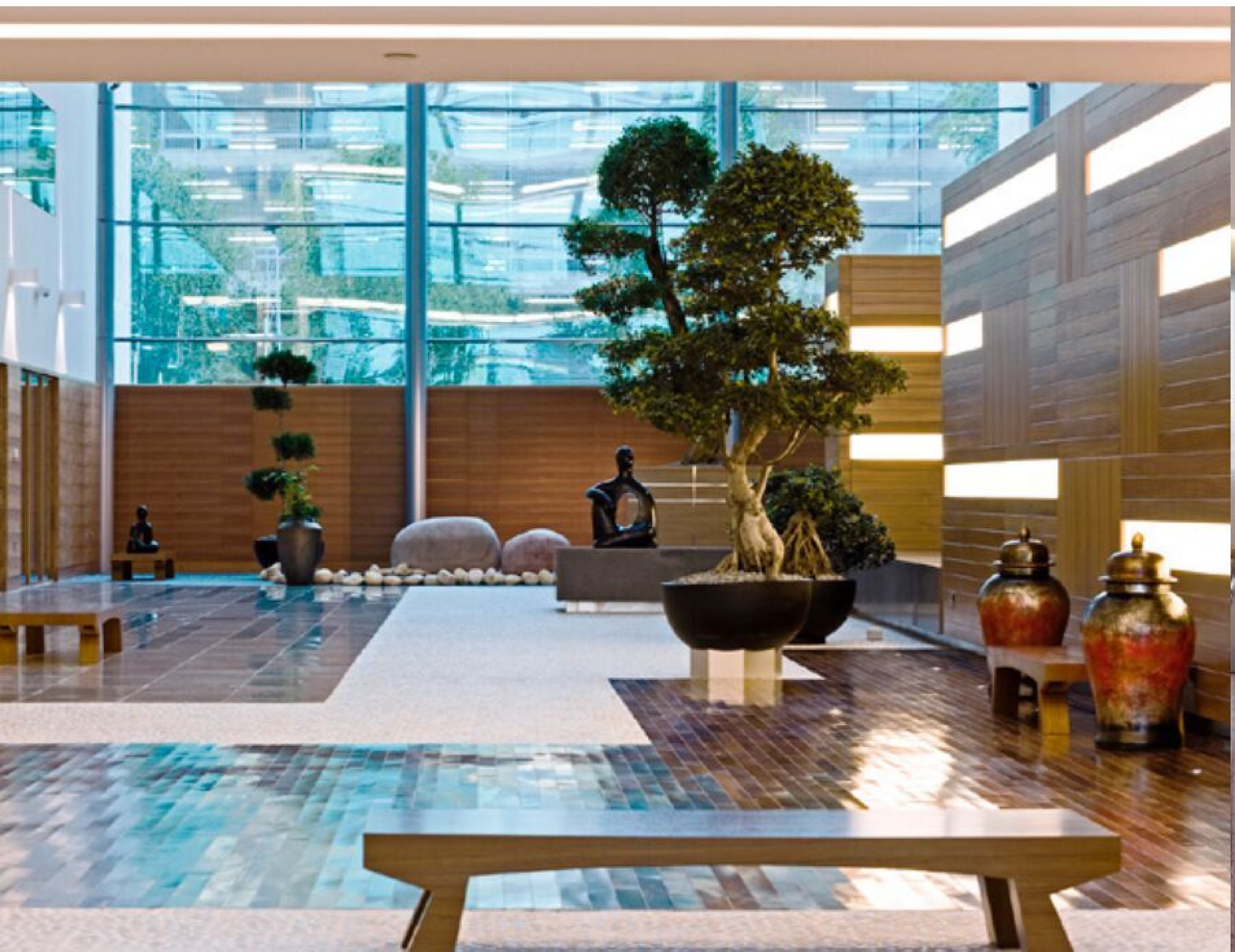
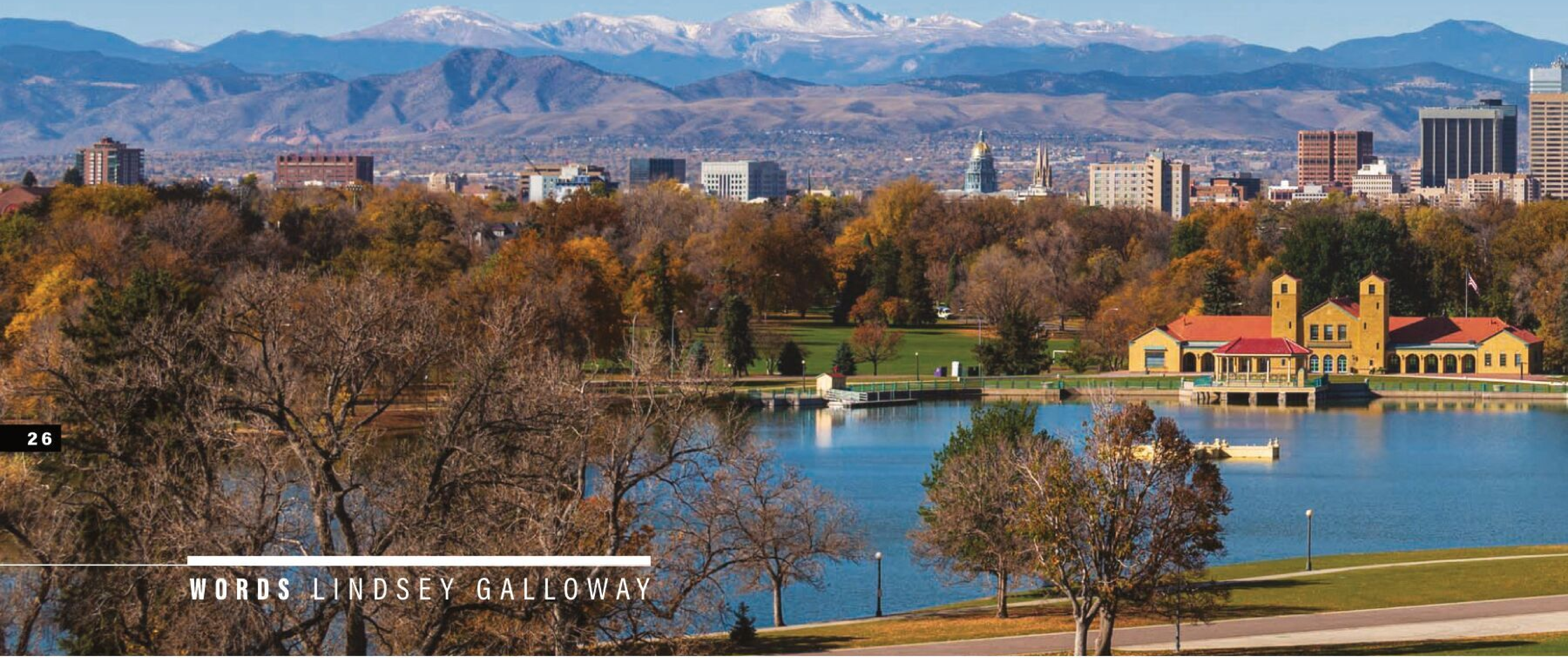


# Head *for* heights

New developments along with a thriving arts hub and the great outdoors have contributed to Denver's steady growth



**WORDS** LINDSEY GALLOWAY

The air may be crisp and cold on this mid-autumn morning, but the sun shines strongly here in Denver, as it does 300 days of the year. In front of Union Station, the city's renovated historic train station, travellers wheel their suitcases off the airport light rail, Denverites walk their dogs big and small, and remote workers sneak into a nearby coffee shop or co-working spot.

The Colorado capital is finally starting to feel like itself again after the pandemic slowed its steady growth. "Downtown Denver became an eerily silent city during the pandemic, and I wasn't certain if we would ever see the downtown streets filled with the hustle and bustle it once had," said Ashley Archibeque, chief of staff of Sentral, a Denver-headquartered property management company specialising in flexible living. "However, people have slowly begun to creep back, and the area near Union Station feels more vibrant, thriving, and lively than it ever was before."

Primely located in the plains stretching before the Rocky Mountains – and famously situated one mile above sea level – Denver has consistently attracted young adults seeking a laidback lifestyle and adventure in the great outdoors. Now, with the rise in remote working, it's not just the raised-in-Denver crowd that resides here. "More and more people continue to eye Denver as a desirable place to live due to the proximity of the mountains, the number of sunshine days each year, the mild

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winters in the city, and the thriving food, music and art scene," said Archibeque. "And Denver continues to expand and change to meet the desires and needs of its new and growing population."

## A CITY FOR ALL SEASONS

Colorado attracts travellers all year long with its outdoor offerings, from Rocky Mountain National Park (one of the most visited national parks in the US) to the world-class ski resorts of Vail, Beaver Creek, Aspen, and Pikes Peak – the summit of which was where the song *America the Beautiful* was penned in 1893. But visitors too often make the mistake of leaving the airport and heading straight to the ski lift or hiking trail, bypassing the city of Denver along the way.

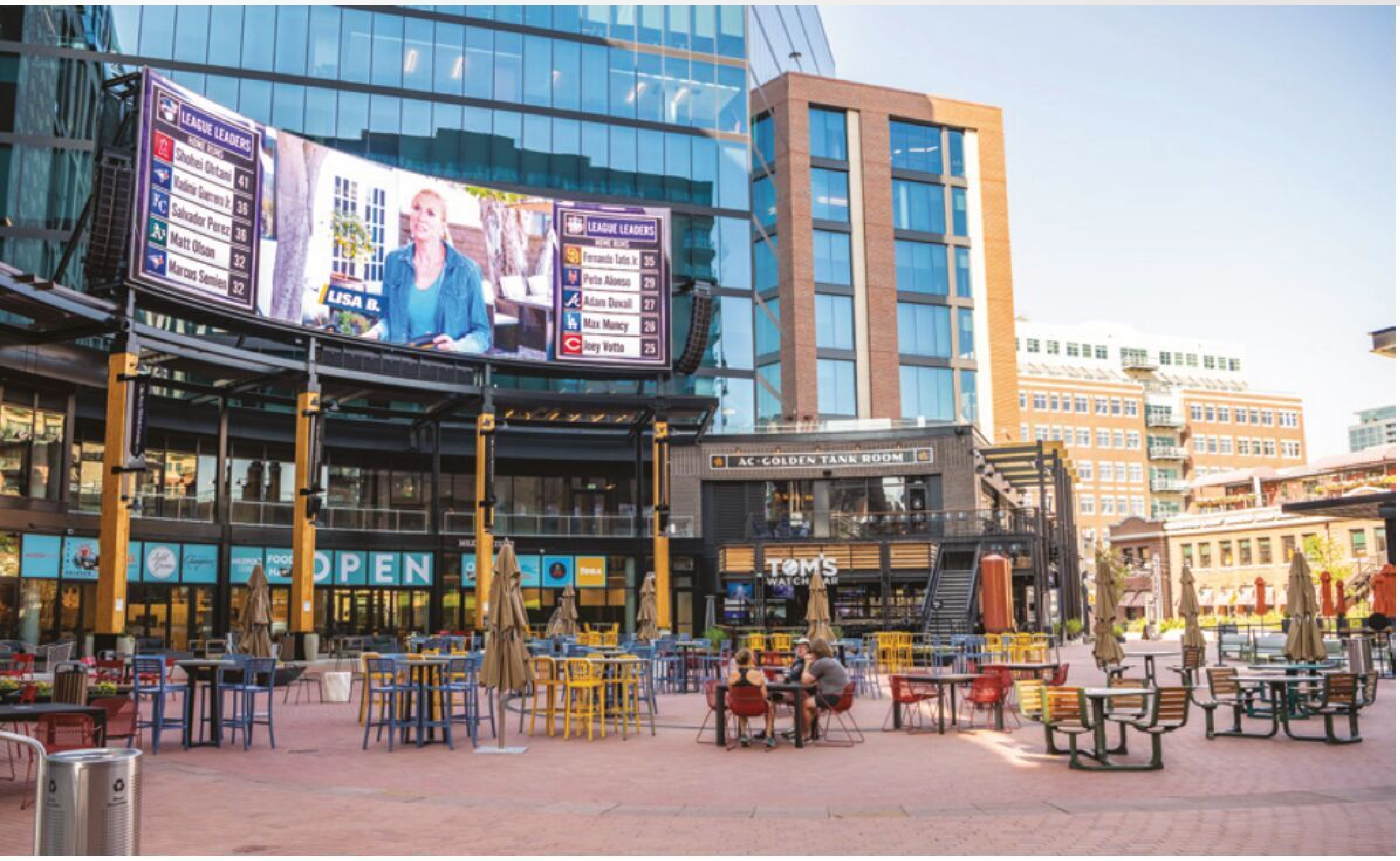
Savvy travellers, especially those coming from places closer to sea level, should consider spending a night or two in Denver to take some time to adjust to the altitude and appreciate all that the Mile High City has to offer.

The opening of the A Line of the RTD light rail in 2016 has made it even easier to traverse from the airport straight to Union Station. The line runs every 15 minutes during peak hours, and every 30 minutes during early mornings and late nights, a 37-minute door-to-door trip.

"If you're planning a visit to the mountains or to the national parks, consider making Denver your base camp," advises Nick LeMasters, president and CEO of the Cherry Creek North Business Improvement District. "Ensure your itinerary allows for enough time to see the culture here that we're extremely proud of." →

**TOP:**
Denver skyline
**LEFT:**
LoDo neigbourhood
**ABOVE:**
Dream Lake in the Rocky Mountain National Park

CREATIVE PEAKS, GRANT CHESIN/ISTOCK



**TOP LEFT:** LED screen at McGregor Square
**TOP RIGHT:** Coors Field baseball park
**ABOVE:** Denver Art Museum

PAGE LIGHT STUDIOS, AIMINGTANG/ISTOCK

## GROWING PAINS

Denver's pandemic slowdown didn't last long. In fact, the city has the sixth fastest growing economy in the entire US, according to research by the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise. The rapid growth hasn't come without its challenges. The median price of a home here has skyrocketed from US$442,000 in 2019 to US$581,000 in 2022, according to data from real estate platform Redfin. The growing population has also put a strain on infrastructure, with typical traffic jams up and down the main north-south Interstate 25 and east-west Interstate 70 corridors, especially during the winter ski season.

But the population growth has also meant a significant boom for development projects throughout the city. LoDo, lower downtown, has long been at the heart of downtown Denver's revitalisation. It was the construction of the Coors Field baseball park in the mid-nineties, however, that brought in record visitors to see the Colorado Rockies and their rivals hit home runs — with the altitude and dry air making the ballpark the most hitter-friendly field in Major League Baseball as balls fly further and faster.

> **Denver has the sixth fastest growing economy in the entire US**

That investment in LoDo has continued with the 2021 opening of McGregor Square, a multi-use development that takes up an entire square block. Its three towers feature the new Rally Hotel (see box), condos, office and retail space, and a plaza with a huge 34-metre LED screen, which broadcasts live games.

Head five minutes southeast of downtown Denver and you'll experience further growth in the upscale business and retail district of Cherry Creek. "Demand for office space has been extraordinary," said LeMasters, with financial institutions and oil and gas businesses interested in the area. He notes retail sales here have finally surpassed 2019 levels.

Cherry Creek North, the outdoor part of the neighbourhood, remains a popular place to get business deals done thanks to its upscale vibe, 70 different dining destinations, and boutique hotels. "People enjoy the fact that they can be in this district and feel that they are in a safe, extremely well-maintained area," said LeMasters. "There's a nice ambiance and charm, along with the best shopping in the Rocky Mountain region, with over two million square feet [185, 806 sqm] of world-class retail offerings."

→

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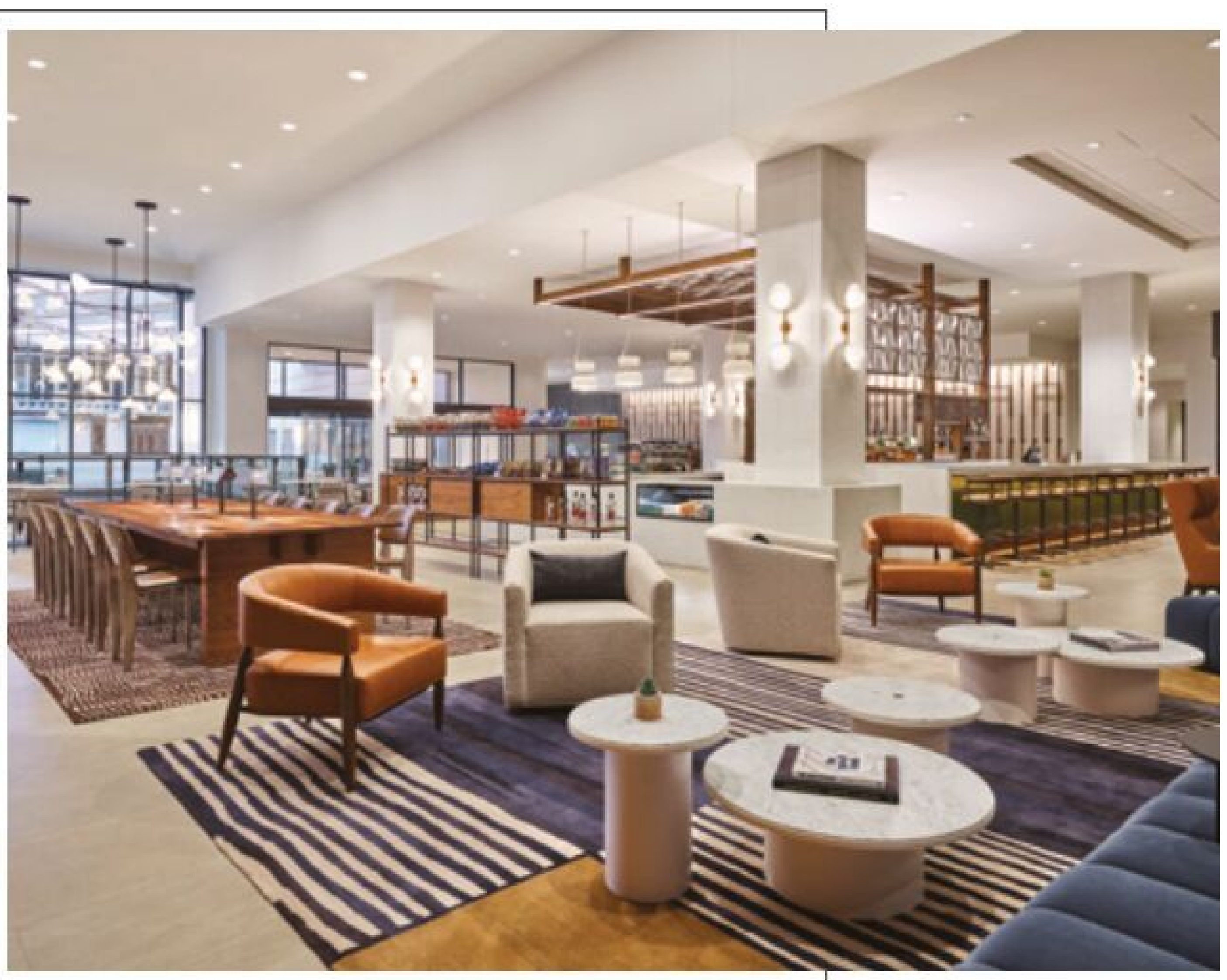
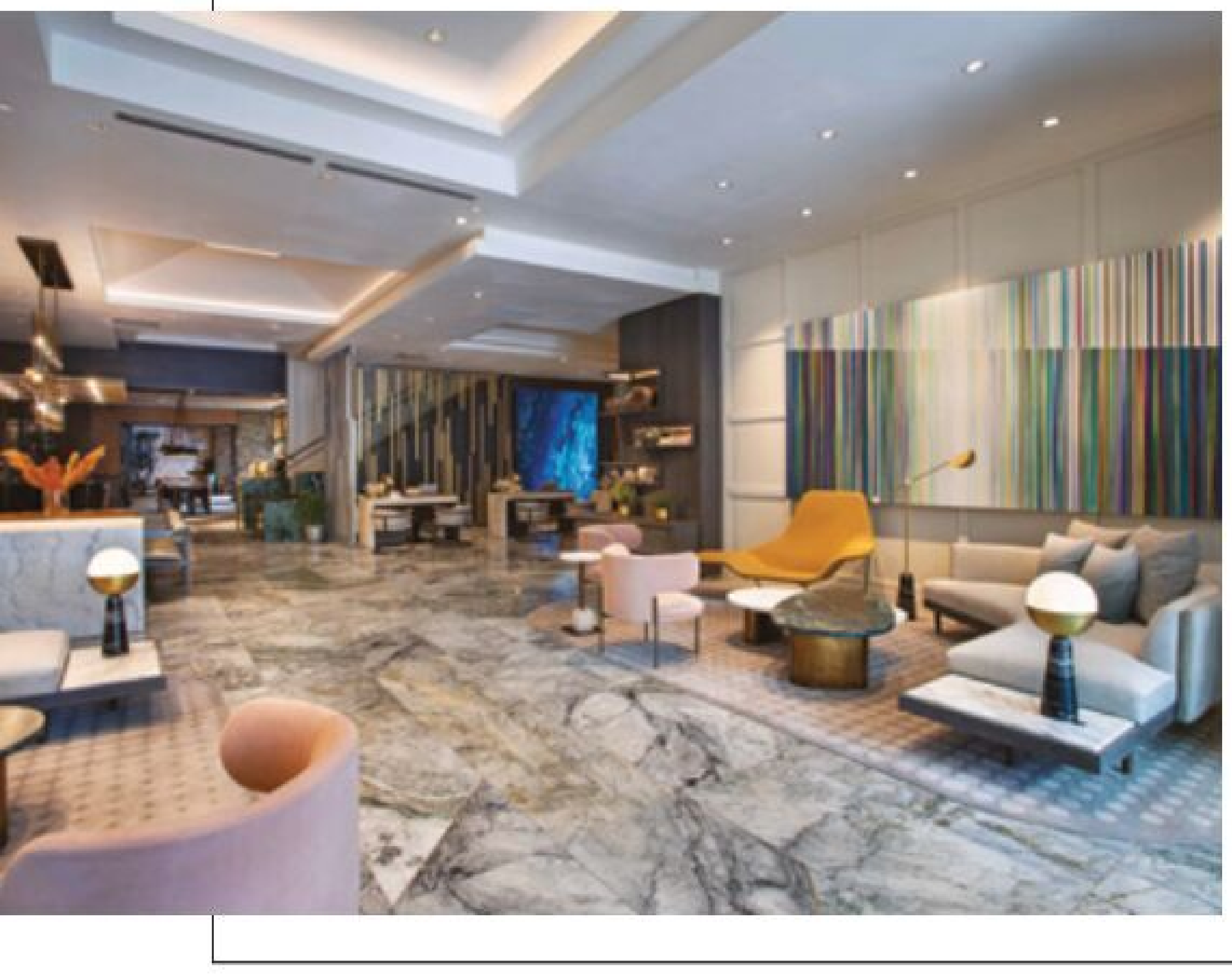
## NEW HOTELS

**THE SHERATON DENVER DOWNTOWN**
In 2021, the Sheraton unveiled an US$80 million renovation touching every area of the hotel, including over 12,000 sqm of renovated meeting space, 1,238 redesigned guest rooms, and 138 suites. The expansive lobby area includes plenty of spots for seating and meetings plus the Coffee Bar Bar, which transforms from café to bar at night. marriott.com

**THE RALLY HOTEL**
The name of this 182-room hotel comes from the age-old baseball tradition of the rally cap, when fans wear their hats backwards or inside out in order to encourage their team to achieve a come-from-behind victory. Appropriately located next to Coors Field in the new McGregor Square development, the hotel also features a rooftop deck and pool, 1,950 sqm of event space, and three on-site restaurants. therallyhotel.com





**THE SLATE DENVER, TAPESTRY COLLECTION BY HILTON**
Housed in the historic Emily Griffith Opportunity School, which pioneered adult public education in Denver, this 251-room hotel sits just across the street from the convention centre. The four-storey property also has 418 sqm of meeting and event space with room names paying tribute to enduring education. theslatedenver.com; hilton.com

**HOTEL CLIO**
Located in the heart of Cherry Creek, this 199-room space opened in 2022 after an extensive renovation and rebrand of the former JW Marriott. The hotel features more than 900 sqm of meeting and event space and the Latin-inspired Toro restaurant, specialising in ceviche and small plates. hotelcliocherrycreek.com

**TOP TO BOTTOM:** Sheraton Denver Downtown; The Rally Hotel; The Slate Denver, Tapestry Collection by Hilton; Hotel Clio

## ART THAT SETS APART

For a funkier vibe, RiNo, short for River North (so named for its location off the north end of the Platte River), has also exploded in popularity in recent years, becoming one of the city's most lively arts and music centres.

Denver's involvement in the arts has always outpaced its size, ranking sixth in overall arts businesses while ranked 19th in population, but the phenomenal growth and success of RiNo and its artists has only spurred increased interest and investment in recent years. In 2021, Denver became the third city in the country (after Santa Fe and Las Vegas) to host a permanent installation of Meow Wolf, a colourful, surreal space that walks visitors through four floors featuring more than 110 Colorado-based artists. The Denver Art Museum also recently celebrated its 50th anniversary with a US$175 million renovation, unveiled in late 2021, that features updated galleries, two new dining spots, and a more inclusive approach. The indigenous art galleries, for instance, now feature video interviews with artists and members of the local Ute, Arapaho, and Cheyenne communities, while textual "Community Labels" give additional local perspective on historical works of art.

## THE CHANGING FACE OF TRAVEL

These cultural offerings have helped domestic travel return to Denver at a respectable pace, with the city seeing 31.7 million total visitors in 2021, a 14.5 per cent increase over 2020 – most of whom travelled from states including Texas, California, and Florida. Indeed Denver International airport has jumped from the fifth busiest airport in the US in 2019 to the third busiest airport in 2021, just after →

> **Denver International airport has jumped from the fifth busiest airport in the US to the third busiest**

SHAWN O'CONNOR; NATHAN HINDMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

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**TOP TO BOTTOM:** Colorado Convention Center; the Great American Beer Festival; Denver International airport

ANDREYKRAV, RA-PHOTOS/ISTOCK

Atlanta and Dallas, with nearly 60 million annual passengers.

The state of Colorado as a whole projects a full international travel recovery by 2024.

To accommodate this rapid growth, the airport has been undergoing a US$770 million renovation of its Great Hall to improve security, ticketing counters, and accommodate the 100 million annual visitors expected in ten years. The project has run into some delays and contractor disputes, slowing the progress, but is currently expected to be completed in 2024.

The airport has also completed its US$2 billion gate expansion project in November, which includes 39 new gates across all three of the airport's concourses, increasing gate capacity by 30 per cent.

While business travel has yet to bounce back to its previous levels, hotels are seeing occupancy numbers that are finally exceeding 2019 levels, with visitation supplemented by a focus on other market segments like group travel, leisure and bleisure.

"At Le Méridien Denver Downtown, we have seen an increase in hotel guests coming to the city to visit family and friends but spending their weekdays working on their computers in the lobby," said Christy DeSiato, the Denver market director of sales and marketing at property management company White Lodging.

> **Bison, rattlesnake and jackalope are just a few of the 13 out-there flavours**

There are still those that come to the city purely for business, however, with Colorado Convention Center's 54,255 sqm of exhibit space popular amongst tech and scientific conventions or trade shows. "From November through June, we see a lot of corporate and convention centre-driven travel, both in terms of hotel and dining guests," said DeSiato.

To cater to growing demand, the convention centre will undergo an expansion in late 2023, adding more than 7,430 sqm of meeting and ballroom space, 3,250 sqm of pre-function space and a 1,858 sqm outdoor terrace on the rooftop of the existing building.

The centre saw the return of The Great American Beer Festival in October 2022, held in Denver annually since 1982 (though there was a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic). More than 40,000 guests clinked glasses as they sampled over 2,000 beers from 200 breweries around the world.

There is no clearer sign of Denver's promising bounce back, a city which prides itself on its nickname 'the Napa Valley of beer'. My recommendation for feeling like a true local would entail sampling a craft beer from one of the city's 100+ breweries, brewpubs, and taprooms. If you're feeling adventurous, pair it with a wild game hot dog from Biker Jim's in LoDo — bison, rattlesnake, and jacakalope (antelope mixed with rabbit) are just a few of the 13 out-there flavours

Just don't forget you're at high altitude, where everything hits harder, and stay hydrated in-between sips if you have meetings the next day. BT

**TAKE ME THERE**

You can book your next trip to Denver with United Airlines at united.com. This winter, it is operating daily nonstop flights to Denver from London Heathrow. Customers travelling in United Polaris® business class can enjoy access to the United Club℠ at Heathrow's Terminal Two and the brand new United Club FlySM in Denver. Be sure to also check out the stunning new airport concourse – with floor-to-ceiling windows and state-of-the-art seating for customers – this new expansion includes an outdoor space complete with firepits, lounge chairs, a pet relief area and an unmatched view of Denver's mountainous skyline.

# Business class seat guide – Middle East

In the second part of a series, *Business Traveller* has compiled a summary of business class seats on airlines flying long haul out of the Middle East

**WORDS** TOM OTLEY

Welcome to our round-up of the long-haul business class seats currently available on Middle East airlines. Last issue we looked at the European airlines, and once again we are focusing on the seats available rather than service elements, such as food and drink, inflight entertainment, amenity products or whether there is wifi available onboard. In part this is because these elements change frequently, and often depend on the length of the flight sector, and also for reasons of brevity. If you visit businesstraveller.com you will find numerous reviews of most of the airlines mentioned here, where all aspects are discussed and assessed in detail.

The good news for travellers is that the majority of airlines offering long-haul flights now have seats that recline fully flat in business class. Most airlines choose from one of several designs, and then, to a greater or lesser extent, add bespoke elements to those seats. This may mean just choosing a distinctive colour scheme to fit in with their brand, or it might mean adding a door to a seat and calling it a suite. The balance for the airline is how to stay price competitive while at the same time differentiating itself from competitors by offering a distinctive experience.

**RIGHT:**
El Al
**BELOW:**
Emirates

## El Al

El Al has a long-haul fleet of B777s and B787s with two different types of business class, though it is gradually retrofitting the older aircraft with its new business class seat. The seat being replaced is currently on its B777 aircraft and is an angled lie-flat seat in a 2-2-2 configuration. These are being replaced by a 1-2-1 fully-flat seat – the Recaro CL6710 – which has direct aisle access and a staggered formation alternating in the cabin, so that some seats are closer to the aisle and in the next row they will be closer to the window.

## Emirates

Emirates has a huge widebody fleet of over 260 aircraft, including B777-200s, B777-300ERs and A380s, but unusually – or perhaps thankfully if you like consistency – has only two types of business class seat. On its 118-strong A380 fleet the business class is a version of Safran's Skylounge seat which is in a

DUNCAN CHARD

staggered configuration of 1-2-1. Note, though, there are several different configurations of this aircraft, from a two-class (economy and business) version up to a four-class (also including first and premium economy), all of which means the business class cabins vary in size and number. On the B777-300 fleet Emirates has a different 2-3-2 configuration. This means that the middle seat of the '3' and also the window seats do not have direct aisle access. The seat reclines into a 72-inch fully-flat bed. On the B777-200 it is the same seat, but in a 2-2-2 configuration.

## Etihad

Etihad's fleet of over 100 aircraft includes long-haul B777-300s, B787s and A350s, plus a few narrowbody aircraft from the A320 family. There are a number of different business class seats across this long-haul fleet, but all recline fully flat into a bed.

On its B787s Etihad has the Business Studio, which is in a staggered 1-2-1 configuration and unusually has both forward and backward-facing seats. Having recently retired its B777-200 fleet, Etihad is keeping the B777-300ER fleet for the moment, and this has the same Business Studio seat just described for the B787s.

On its A350 fleet Etihad has the Collins Super Diamond seat (the same as the new British Airways Club Suite) in a 1-2-1 configuration. On new deliveries of the B787 the airline is going for the new Collins Aerospace Elements seat which features a reverse herringbone configuration with privacy doors.

## Gulf Air

Gulf Air has an all B787-9 long-haul fleet. Its business class is called Falcon Gold, and in that cabin you will find 26 seats with a seat pitch of between 80-89 inches (depending on whether in the front row or not), all of which recline fully flat. The seat is the same across the fleet – it is the Serenity

→

**TOP TO BOTTOM:** Two views of the Etihad seat; and two views of the Falcon Gold seat on Gulf Air

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Suite by Collins Aerospace (previously known as the Apex Suite by B/E Aerospace), in a 2-2-2 configuration, though these window seats are staggered so all seats have direct aisle access.

## Oman Air

Oman Air's long-haul fleet is made up of B787-9 aircraft and A330s. Like Gulf Air, the airline has a consistent business class seat which is the Serenity Suite by Collins Aerospace (previously known as the Apex Suite by B/E Aerospace). It is in a staggered 2-2-2 configuration, so all seats have direct aisle access and recline fully flat.

## Qatar Airways

Qatar has a large fleet (230 and counting) of largely widebody aircraft, and with several different types of business class. The fleet is diverse B777-300ER, B777-200LRs, B787-8, B787-9s, A350-900 and A350-1000, A330-200 and A330-300 and A380s, some of which have been brought out of retirement.

On its B787 and early A350 deliveries, Qatar had the Collins Aerospace Super Diamond Seat – a reverse herringbone configuration of 1-2-1 with direct aisle access for all seats and a seat which reclined into an 80-inch bed. In March 2017 the airline introduced the forward and backward-facing Collins-manufactured Q-suite and this has been installed on a wide swathe of the fleet, including the B777-300ER, A350s and B787-9s. These seats (or suites) have sliding privacy doors and depending on where you sit, and your preference, can be arranged so a family of four could spend a flight together in (almost) a private cabin. The seats on the majority of the B777-300ER fleet recline fully flat to an 80-inch long bed, and are 21 inches wide (21.5 on the A350s), but note there are still a couple of B777s that have lie-flat seats.

On these A350s, things get more complicated, though. Qatar has both →

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**LEFT:** Oman Air
**BELOW:** Two of the different business class seats available on Qatar Airways

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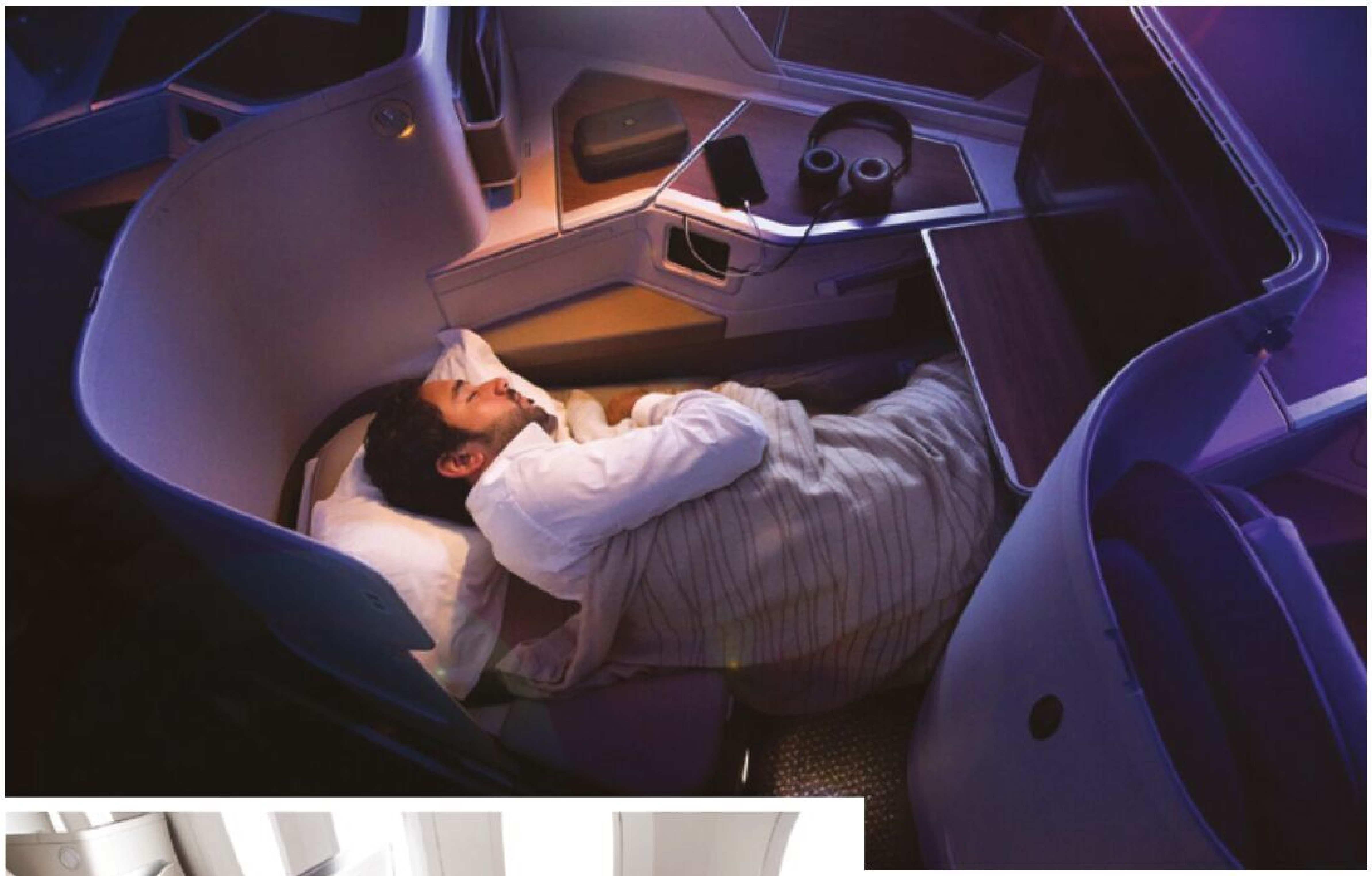
A350-900 and A350-1000s, though it is also in a well-publicised dispute with the manufacturer over the fuselage, and has grounded around half of its 50-plus fleet. It is one of the reasons the A380 has been brought out of retirement – luckily this has the Super Diamond seat in business class. Some of the A350s have the Q Suite and some have the Super Diamond. The airline also has another seat on its B787-9 deliveries: the Adient Ascent business class suite. This is in a 1-2-1 herringbone layout, with all 30 suites benefitting from direct aisle access and sliding privacy doors. Features include a 79-inch fully-flat bed, and a dedicated mobile phone holder with wireless charging technology which can be used with compatible IOS and Android devices. Passengers sitting in adjoining centre suites can also "slide the privacy panels away at the touch of a button to create their very own enclosed private space".

## Royal Jordanian

Royal Jordanian has a long-haul fleet of B787-8 aircraft. Its Crown Class business class has the Collins Aerospace Diamond (not Super Diamond) model in a 2-2-2 configuration, and if you are in a window seat you do not have direct aisle access. The seats recline to a fully-flat bed of 78 inches long and are 19 inches wide with 60 inches of seat pitch (legroom).

## Saudia

Saudia's long-haul fleet includes A330s, B777-300ERs, B787-9s and B787-10s. On the A330s and B777-300ERs it is the Collins Aerospace Diamond, in a 2-2-2 configuration, which reclines fully flat with a 21 inch seat width and 60-61 inch seat pitch. Window seats do not have direct aisle access. On the B787 aircraft it is the Collins Aerospace Super Diamond in a 1-2-1 configuration with direct aisle access for all passengers. It reclines fully flat with a 20 inch seat width and 47 inch seat pitch. BT



**TOP:** Royal Jordanian
**ABOVE AND LEFT:** Saudia

■ Many airlines have varied fleets of long-haul aircraft with sometimes several different types of business class seats onboard. We have contacted all the airlines here to check the facts, but it is possible we have made mistakes, for which we apologise and will, of course, keep the online version of this feature corrected.

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BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS •2022•

# THE STARS OF THE INDUSTRY

**Your votes have been cast – here are the winners of the *Business Traveller Awards 2022***

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COLLINSON

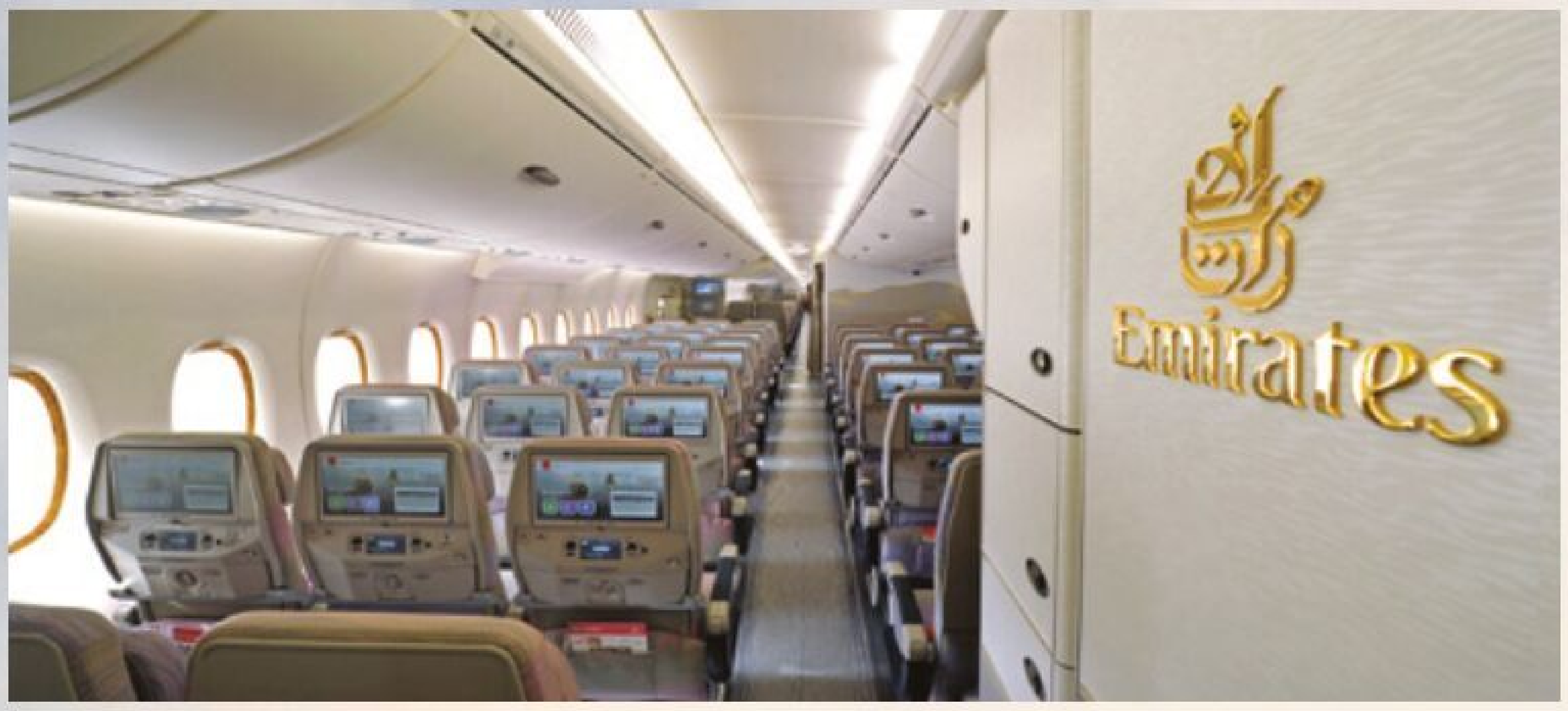
**LEFT:** Host Justin Webb entertained guests with his stories of working and travelling around the United States and meeting presidents

It's time to reveal the winners of the hotly contested *Business Traveller* Awards 2022. Voted for entirely by you, the readers, the awards celebrate the achievements of the airlines, airports, hotels, rail operators, car hire companies and card companies that have impressed you the most on your travels over the past year. New cateogries this year included Best MICE Destination in Europe and Worldwide, Best River or Specialist Cruise Line, and Best Ocean Cruise Line.

Completely independent, the awards are widely seen as the leading accolades in the business travel industry. There is no pre-selection by the *Business Traveller* team and all of the data provided by voters is analysed by a market research company to ascertain the winners.

We were delighted to host the event in person for the first time since the onset of the pandemic at a lunch at London's Royal Garden Hotel on October 31. The ceremony was presented by our special guest, journalist, broadcaster and presenter of the Today programme Justin Webb. Announcing the results – as decided by our readers – were *Business Traveller* editorial director Tom Otley and Panacea Media managing director Julian Gregory. The event was kindly sponsored by Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH), CityDoc, Collinson, Delta, Heathrow Express and South Western Railway.

SINGAPORE AIRLINES



BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

**FROM TOP:** Emirates economy class; Qatar business class; host Justin Webb with Eric Odone of Qatar Airways and Wayne Bridgett of CityDoc

BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

**LEFT:** Mohamed Rafi Mar and Sek Eng Lee from Singapore Airlines

# AIRLINES

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### BEST AIRLINE

1. **Singapore Airlines**
2. Qatar Airways
3. Emirates
4. British Airways
5. Virgin Atlantic

### BEST SHORT-HAUL CARRIER

1. **British Airways**
2. Jet2
3. Aegean Airlines
4. SWISS

### BEST LONG-HAUL AIRLINE

1. **Qatar Airways**
2. Singapore Airlines
3. Emirates
4. Virgin Atlantic

### BEST FREQUENT FLYER PROGRAMME

1. **British Airways Executive Club**
2. Virgin Atlantic Flying Club
3. Qantas Frequent Flyer
4. Air Canada – Aeroplan

### BEST FIRST CLASS

1. **Singapore Airlines**
2. Emirates
3. British Airways
4. Lufthansa

### BEST BUSINESS CLASS

1. **Qatar Airways**
2. Singapore Airlines
3. Virgin Atlantic
4. Emirates
5. British Airways

### BEST PREMIUM ECONOMY CLASS

1. **Virgin Atlantic**
2. British Airways
3. Singapore Airlines
4. Emirates

### BEST ECONOMY CLASS

1. **Emirates**
2. Virgin Atlantic
3. Singapore Airlines
4. Qatar Airways

→

ALEKSANDR VRZALSKI; RICHARD GRAY

BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARD

# AIRLINES

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### BEST NORTH AMERICAN AIRLINE

1 **Delta Air Lines**
**2** United Airlines
**3** American Airlines
**4** Air Canada

### BEST CABIN STAFF

1 **Singapore Airlines**
**2** Virgin Atlantic
**3** Qatar Airways
**4** Emirates

### BEST AIRLINE ALLIANCE

1 **oneworld**
**2** Star Alliance
**3** SkyTeam

### BEST LOW-COST AIRLINE

1 **easyJet**
**2** Jet2
**3** Indigo
**4** Air Asia

### BEST ASIAN AIRLINE

1 **Singapore Airlines**
**2** Japan Airlines
**3** Cathay Pacific
**4** ANA

### BEST MIDDLE EASTERN AIRLINE

1 **Qatar Airways**
**2** Emirates
**3** Etihad Airways
**4** El Al

BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

### BEST AFRICAN AIRLINE

1 **Ethiopian Airlines**
**2** South African Airways
**3** Kenya Airways
**4** Royal Air Maroc

**FAR LEFT:** Nadia Clinton from Delta Air Lines
**LEFT:** Henock Woubishet and Mohammed Ali of Ethiopian Airlines

### BEST INFLIGHT FOOD & BEVERAGE

1 **Qatar Airways**
**2** Singapore Airlines
**3** Emirates
**4** Virgin Atlantic

### BEST INFLIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

1 **Emirates**
**2** Qatar Airways
**3** Singapore Airlines
**4** Virgin Atlantic

→

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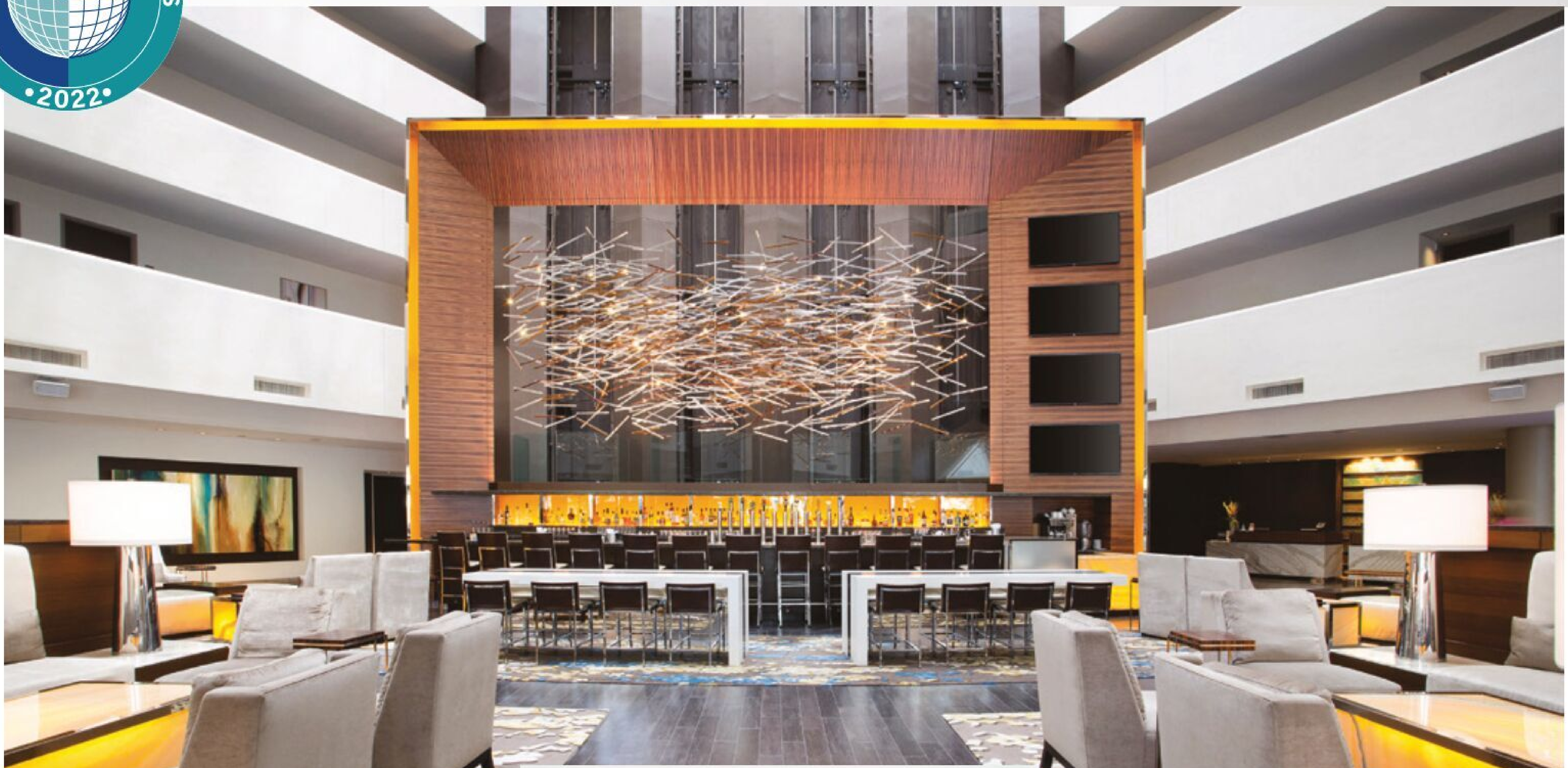

BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

**THIS PAGE:** Hilton McLean Tysons Corner; Host Justin Webb with Hilton's Stephen Cassidy and Mark Eastwood from Heathrow Express

# HOTELS

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### BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND WORLDWIDE

**1 Hilton Hotels & Resorts**
**2** Mandarin Oriental
**3** Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts
**4** InterContinental Hotels & Resorts
**5** JW Marriott

### BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN THE UK

**1 Premier Inn**
**2** Hilton Hotels & Resorts
**3** Hotel du Vin
**4** Malmaison

### BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN EUROPE

**1 Hilton Hotels & Resorts**
**2** NH Hotels
**3** InterContinental Hotels & Resorts
**4** Marriott Hotels

### BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN NORTH AMERICA

**1 Marriott Hotels**
**2** Hilton Hotels & Resorts
**3** Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts
**4** InterContinental Hotels & Resorts

### BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN MIDDLE EAST

**1 Rotana Hotels & Resorts**
**2** Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts
**3** InterContinental Hotels & Resorts
**4** Marriott Hotels

### BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN ASIA PACIFIC

**1 The Peninsula Hotels**
**2** Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts
**3** Mandarin Oriental
**4** Conrad Hotels & Resorts

### BEST BUDGET HOTEL BRAND

**1 Premier Inn**
**2** Travelodge
**3** ibis
**4** Holiday Inn Express

### BEST LUXURY HOTEL BRAND

**1 Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts**
**2** The Peninsula Hotels
**3** Mandarin Oriental
**4** Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts

### BEST HOTEL LOYALTY SCHEME

**1 Hilton Honors**
**2** IHG One Rewards
**3** Marriott Bonvoy
**4** ALL – Accor Live Limitless

### BEST SERVICED APARTMENT BRAND

**1 Ascott The Residence**
**2** Citadines
**3** Fraser Suites
**4** Staybridge Suites

### BEST INDEPENDENT HOTEL BRAND

**1 citizenM**
**2** Rosewood Hotels & Resorts
**3** Belmond
**4** Rocco Forte Hotels

### BEST AIRPORT HOTEL

**1 Sofitel, London Heathrow**
**2** Crowne Plaza, Singapore
**3** Regal Airport Hotel, Hong Kong
**4** Hilton Amsterdam Airport Schiphol

→

BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Premier Inn London King's Cross; Aidan Walshe and Tamara Strauss of Premier Inn; Andrew Harrison from Four Seasons; CitizenM La Defense; a Grand Premier Suite at the Peninsula Paris; and a Grand Imperial View Suite at the Four Seasons Tokyo Otemachi

FOUR SEASONS; WILLIAM FURNISS; RICHARD POWERS

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Heathrow Airport, Lye Teck Tan receiving the award on behalf of Singapore Changi Airport; Changi Airport; Leesa Campbell-Colquhoun of Heathrow

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BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

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## AIRPORTS

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### BEST AIRPORT LOUNGE

1 **British Airways Concorde Room, T5, London Heathrow**
**2** Virgin Atlantic Clubhouse, London Heathrow
**3** Cathay Pacific, First Class, London Heathrow
**4** Qatar Airways, Al Mourjan Business Class Lounge, Doha

### BEST AIRPORT IN THE WORLD

1 **Singapore Changi Airport**
**2** Heathrow Airport, London
**3** Hamad International Airport, Doha
**4** Dubai International Airport
**5** Munich Airport

### BEST AIRPORT FOR TAX-FREE SHOPPING

1 **Heathrow Airport, London**
**2** Singapore Changi Airport
**3** Dubai International Airport
**4** Hamad International Airport, Doha

### BEST AIRPORT IN EUROPE

1 **Heathrow Airport, London**
**2** Amsterdam Schiphol Airport
**3** London City Airport
**4** Zurich Airport

### BEST AIRPORT IN NORTH AMERICA

1 **Los Angeles International Airport**
**2** JFK International Airport, New York
**3** San Francisco International Airport
**4** Dallas Fort Worth International Airport

### BEST AIRPORT IN ASIA-PACIFIC

1 **Singapore Changi Airport**
**2** Hong Kong International Airport
**3** Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport
**4** Tokyo Haneda Airport

### BEST AIRPORT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

1 **Hamad International Airport, Doha**
**2** Dubai International Airport
**3** Abu Dhabi International Airport
**4** Muscat International Airport

→

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4 Briggs & Riley

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2 BA American Express Premium Plus
3 Halifax Clarity
4 Revolut

### BEST TRAVEL APP

**1 British Airways**
2 Booking.com
3 Tripit
4 Skyscanner

### BEST RIVER OR SPECIALIST CRUISE LINE

**1 Viking River Cruises**
2 Avalon Waterways
3 Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours
4 Hurtigruten

### BEST OCEAN CRUISE LINE

**1 Cunard**
2 Celebrity Cruises
3 Silversea
4 Regent Seven Sea Cruises

**FROM FAR LEFT:** Tracy Halliwell of London & Partners and Shaun Leleu of SLH; Ian Selby of LNER; Bryony Gammon of Viking River Cruises and Joe Thurgood, SWR

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2 Avanti West Coast
3 GWR
4 Heathrow Express

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2 Hertz
3 Sixt
4 Enterprise

### BEST CAR RENTAL COMPANY IN EUROPE

**1 Avis**
2 Hertz
3 Sixt
4 Europcar

### BEST MICE DESTINATION IN EUROPE

**1 London**
2 Barcelona
3 Paris
4 Amsterdam

### BEST MICE DESTINATION WORLDWIDE

**1 Singapore**
2 London
3 Dubai
4 New York

JEREMY STEWARDSON, LUKE STACKPOOLE, ABHISHEK UMRAO/UNSPLASH

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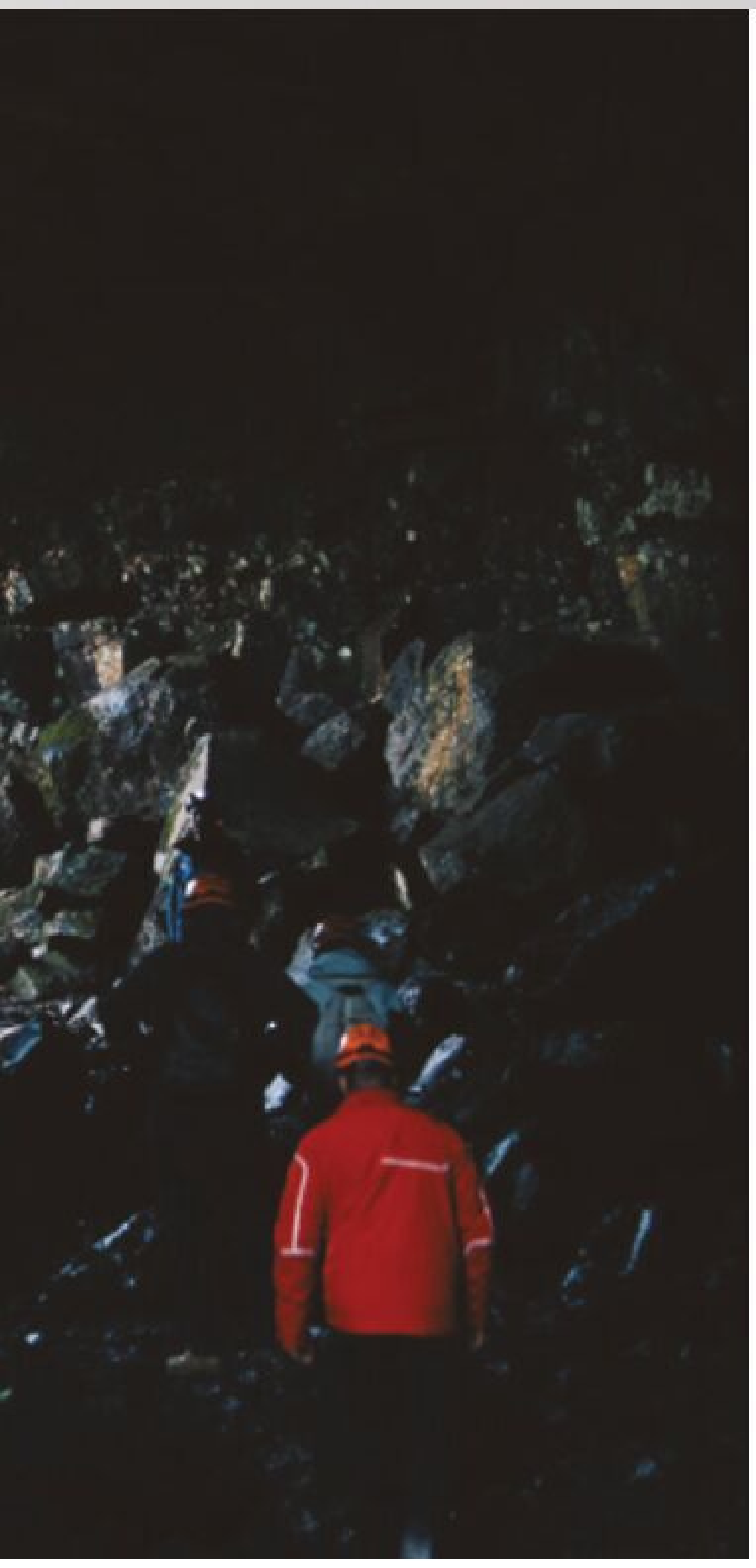
# RISKING IT IN REYKJAVIK

Wild beauty and a sense of danger are attracting groups to explore Iceland's sustainable MICE offerings

**WORDS** HANNAH BRANDLER



Headlights on, and nerves on edge, we clambered down the crevasse into the 900m-long dark underbelly of Iceland. We were visiting a 2,000-year-old lava cave located in the lunar-like landscape of the Reykjanes Peninsula. Its name – Leidarendi – translates as 'the end of the road', but thankfully our down-to-earth (pun-intended) tour guides from Iceland Travel were practised at putting us at ease. Soon enough we were confidently crouching and using our senses to navigate the jagged and slippery terrain, passing by stalactites and even a sheep skeleton along the way.

"We inspire awe when we bring people out here," project manager Mathieu Tari explained, before convincing us to turn off our headlights and soak in the absolute blackness and solitude of the subterranean tunnels. Since the pandemic there has been an increase in such requests, with these experiences proving popular with incentive groups keen to distance themselves from screens and return to Earth's roots. "It's much more about experiencing the country as a natural object. People want time to breathe in the nature," he adds.

**FAR LEFT:** Geothermal activity across the Reykjanes Peninsula
**TOP LEFT:** Exploring an ancient lava cave
**TOP RIGHT:** Soaking up the mineral goodness of the Sky Lagoon

> **We warmed our hands on steam rising from the moss while gazing silently at the landscape**

We subsequently jumped on quad bikes and drove across the wild terrain (described as 'the playground') to reach Eldvorp, a 10km row of craters located northwest of Grindavik on the Reykjanes Peninsula, where we warmed our hands on steam rising from the moss while gazing in silence at the landscape. Our faces were clearly very expressive, however, with Tari telling us that "experiencing [Iceland] through visitors is amazing".

If the notions of caving and being thrown around in a jeep don't excite you, Reykjavik also has plenty to offer to the risk averse. With its volcanic terrain comes hot geothermal springs, where you can take a break from daredevil activities. Instead, enjoy a cleansing mud mask and a pint of Gull beer in the mineral-rich waters of the well-known Blue Lagoon, or its recent deluxe addition the Sky Lagoon, which offers a seven-step 'Ritual' – recommended for those recovering from one too many late-night shots of the Icelandic spirit Brennivin.

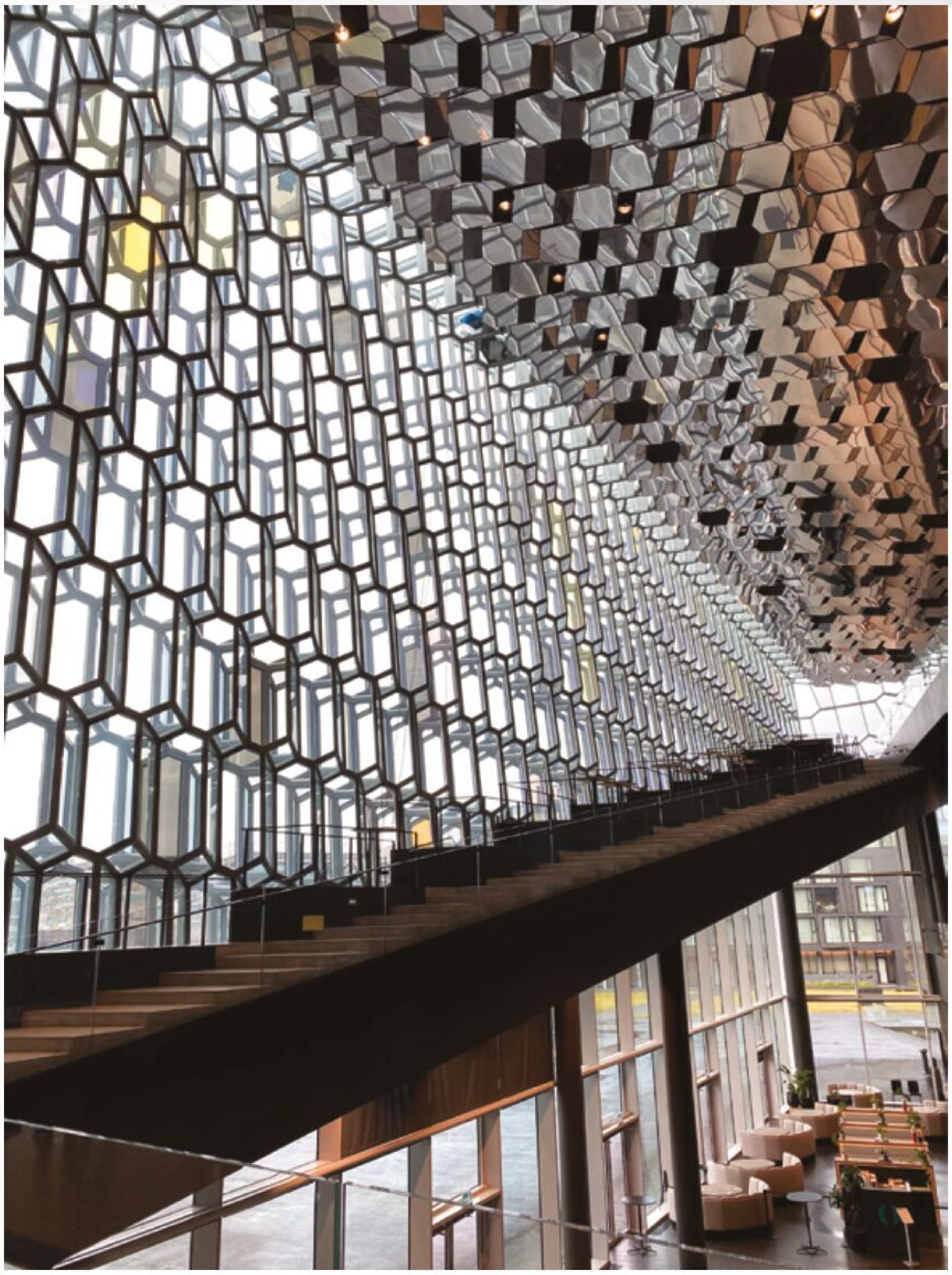
## The jewel of the city

Iceland is widely regarded as a bucket list destination, though the locals tell me that this interest blew up, quite literally, with the famous Eyjafjallajökull eruption in 2010 – Iceland's best "PR stunt" yet, the tour guides joke in their typically dry Icelandic humour. Prior to this event, the country saw approximately half a million tourists annually, but by 2017 this figure had surpassed the two million mark.

This rapid growth in visitors begs the question as to whether Reykjavik is prepared for large-scale meetings, conferences and events. Harpa, the state and city-owned cultural and conference centre, has "really been a gamechanger" in terms of putting Iceland on the MICE map, according to its director, Svanhildur Konradsdottir.

Open since 2011, the scintillating geometric structure, inspired by the country's basalt landscape, hosts approximately 1,200-1,400 events per year, 700 of which are cultural events. It is home to the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, Icelandic Opera and Reykjavik Big Band, and its post-pandemic calendar is looking incredibly busy. "There has really been an avalanche of events and we have a very strong booking position →

RUSLAN VALEEV/UNSPLASH; SKY ALGOON BY PURSUIT



throughout the year and next year as well," says Konradsdottir.

As I toured the centre it became clear why this was the case. Aesthetically, it is mesmerising. Designed by Henning Larsen Architects and Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson, the façade features 10,000 glass panels in various shapes, pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle – the idea being that the exterior reflects different vistas as the atmospheric sky changes. It also has state-of-the-art acoustic technology ('Harpa' translates to harp) and there are a variety of spaces to choose from – whether that be the impressive concert hall, the 'pizza slice' rooms with mountain views, or the split-level space at the pinnacle of the building with views of the city's lively harbour.

## Spend on sustainability

The challenge facing companies is the cost. How can businesses justify such an expensive location for MICE? That's where the country's environmentally friendly credentials come in. Most companies are looking to reduce their carbon footprint and Iceland is a great destination to fulfil such criteria.

"I think Harpa is in a very strong position even though it costs a bit more to get here than having your event next door," explains Konradsdottir. Harpa is entirely heated and cooled by geothermal energy, and recently received the Nordic Swan accreditation for its event operations. LED lights were installed in the halls and public spaces in 2021, while heat from the halls is rechannelled towards the front of the building to warm the open public spaces.

"We are looking at the situation in Europe and we are concerned like everyone else about the economic situation and the challenges when it comes to energy costs. At the moment, at least, it's not an issue that we have in Iceland," explains Konradsdottir. The city is powered by 100 per cent sustainable energy, with all homes and businesses heated by hydro and geothermal energy.

Harpa is entirely heated and cooled by geothermal energy

Its location between mainland Europe and North America also makes it a prime meeting place for international companies, with the added benefit of fewer air miles. "Iceland is definitely a very valuable and interesting location for international events that are transatlantic," Konradsdottir tells me.

Beyond this, the country ranks highly in matters of equality and human rights, achieving first place in the Global Gender Gap Index and the Global Peace Index among other important titles – further enhancing its attractivity to high-level officials and businesses. Many of the events held at Harpa "are associated with issues close to the Icelandic heart". This includes annual events such as the Arctic Circle Assembly, which sees 2,000 participants discuss the future of the Arctic and the planet, and The Reyjkavik Global Forum, which focuses on gender equality.

## A place to stay

The final hurdle for the city is the provision of suitable accommodation. It has made strides in this department, with the recently opened Reykjavik Edition (a Marriott brand) marking a new era for luxury stays in the Icelandic capital. →

**TOP:** The stunning exterior of Harpa features thousands of glass panels

# A unique scene for magical moments in Reykjavík

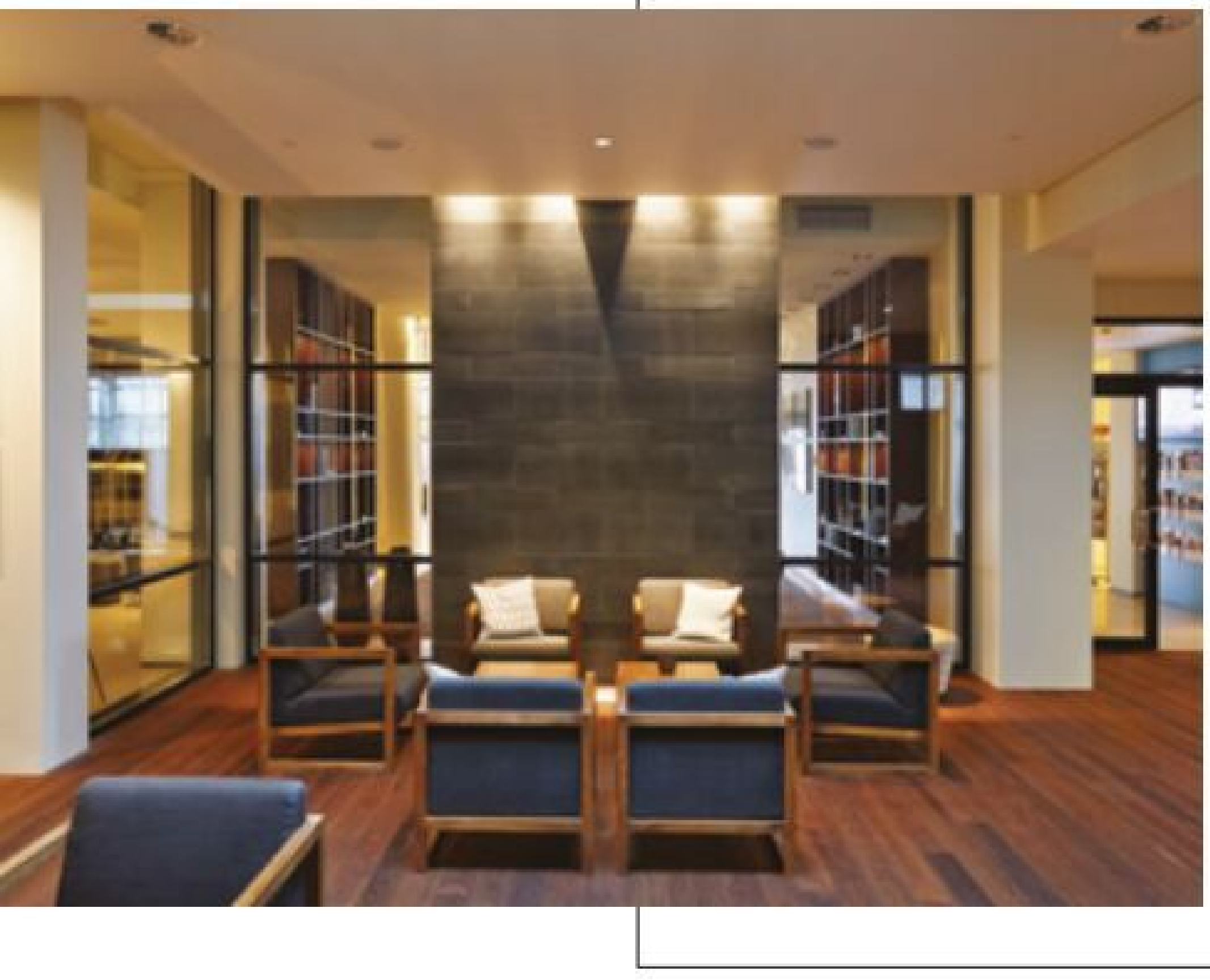
Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Centre is located in the heart of Reykjavík, Iceland. This unique architectural artwork is situated in the city centre, on the picturesque Reykjavík harbour, and features stunning views of the surrounding mountains and the North Atlantic Ocean.

Harpa's Conference Department has received the **Nordic Swan Ecolabel** and hosts international events and conferences of all sizes. Harpa's goal is to reduce the environmental impact of events and be as environmentally friendly as possible in the process. Event organizers at Harpa can receive an Event Impact Report after their event.

**harpa.is**

HARPA

## HOTEL EVENT SPACES



### Hotel Reykjavik Grand

This 311-room hotel is part of the Islands Hotel collection, which comprises 18 three- and four-star hotels across the country. This property offers over 1,950 sqm of event space, which includes 11 meeting rooms and a total capacity of 800 people. It is currently undergoing an expansion, which will see the addition of 120 guest rooms and ten function spaces within a new eight-storey tower. The collection has six further hotels in the capital. **islandshotel.is**

### Hilton Reykjavik Nordica

This 251-room hotel in central Reykjavik has 17 function spaces with a wooden chalet feel, including a 530 sqm conference hall and a 440 sqm pre-function/exhibition space. It can host meetings of up to 650 guests in the main function space and banqueting area. Further facilities include an executive lounge, along with excellent seasonal Nordic cuisine – particularly the lunch buffet at Vox restaurant, and an on-site spa. **hilton.com**

### Iceland Parliament Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton

This 163-room hotel opens on December 20, and is located next door to Althing, the Icelandic Parliament. The property offers over 790 sqm of event space across six meeting venues, while further facilities include an executive lounge, spa and restaurant. **hilton.com**

**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT:** Hotel Reykjavic Grand, Iceland Parliament Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton; Hilton Reykjavik Nordica

**ABOVE:** Roof terrace at The Reykjavik Edition

NIKOLAS KOENIG 2021

Located opposite Harpa, this is the first five-star hotel in the city, boasting a sleek Scandi-style design, the first hammam in the city, and a rooftop overlooking the harbour. It has played an important role in providing the conference centre with the opportunity to attract a new kind of clientele. "Icelanders initially thought that luxury [clients] would come and then we would bring the properties. But first you need to have the product and then the clientele will arrive," the hotel's director of group sales Sigrun Gunnarsdottir explains. This required training, too, to bring staff up to speed on the standard expected by luxury clients, notably those from North America who are members of loyalty programme Marriott Bonvoy. "The biggest differentiator between us and the competition is the service we offer. Icelanders are quite informal, not used to much service, but the extensive training has taken the experience to a new level," she adds. In terms of event venues, the property has over 500 sqm of space, including three studios, a boardroom and a ballroom with a pre-function space and a separate entrance. The hotel's maroon-hued Sunset nightclub is also currently for event-use only and offers a pool table, retro arcade machines and a photobooth.

Additionally, the hotel's suites with floor-to-ceiling glass windows can also be used as meeting rooms – recommended is the Ocean View Corner Suite with views of a working harbour, a sure way to quell your writer's block.

"Iceland has everything to easily answer the needs of clients," Tari concludes. As the trip came to an end, it was difficult to find flaws in his conviction. Experiences here don't feel manufactured, but rather draw on the country's natural resources all the while respecting them.

As put by one of our tour guides, "we're on an island that seems ready to explode at any moment. It puts some salt on the experience". Indeed, our visit came after the eruption of Fagradalsfjall in August, which marked the first of its kind in the Reykjanes Peninsula for almost 870 years. "We run towards danger," Tari says. The only question left to ask is: will you? I certainly recommend it. BT

### USEFUL CONTACTS

- Meet in Reykjavik meetinreykjavik.is
- Business Iceland businessiceland.is
- Harpa harpa.is

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# Competitive disadvantage

*New rail operators have a tough time breaking into the market, but it's much better for customers when they succeed*

**ALEX MCWHIRTER**
CONSUMER CHAMPION AND RAIL EXPERT

In general, competition is a good thing for transport modes, acting as a spur for service improvements and pricing.

Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the EU, in mainland Europe the state incumbents continue to resist new market entrants. In previous columns I have detailed the issues faced by night train operators in their bid to introduce new services, and not a single operator has yet launched a service aimed at business users.

The same situation is true for new daytime entrants. Two routes where competition is sorely needed include Eurostar's service between London and Paris and the core Amsterdam-Brussels-Paris line operated by Thalys. The lack of competition to Eurostar has been reported many times previously so I shall not repeat. But Thalys (which will soon merge with Eurostar) badly needs a high-speed (HS) rival. No new trains have been acquired since the 1990s, even though the market has grown a lot since then, and the lack of capacity spells higher fares.

## HOLD THE LINE

Where France's SNCF has seen competition (albeit only on one route at the time of writing) the benefits are clear. Italy's Trenitalia entered the Paris-Lyon-Milan route last December, after waiting two years for approval by France's rail regulator, and capacity has since increased, leading to better value fares and a better product both for Paris-Lyon and Paris-Milan.

The next route where SNCF is expected to face competition is Paris-Barcelona. When this route finally became HS throughout its length it was hailed as a route that would divert traffic from air to rail. But it never happened. Until December SNCF and Spain's Renfe operated the route on a JV (joint venture) basis. It meant these two provided a single train for much of the year which hardly encouraged travellers to switch from air. Now that the JV has ended, SNCF has decided to upgrade to double-daily services, and increase this further to three trains a day from summer 2023. Renfe's riposte is awaited.

France has one of the most restrictive markets for rail, where newcomers are discouraged. According to All Rail, a body that represents new rail entrants, "France has one of Europe's highest track access charges. These are too expensive for new [private] entrants. In addition there is a lack of access to second-hand rolling stock, and for new entrants, brand new is too expensive."

> **In contrast to France, travellers find the most competitive HS markets in Italy**

Indeed SNCF has been scrapping its older TGVs along with some of the original Eurostar stock. Critics say that some of this rolling stock ought to have been made available to a new entrant. Hence France's Le Train, which had hoped to acquire some of SNCF's older TGVs, has had to abandon its plans.

In contrast to France, travellers find the most competitive HS market on domestic routes in Italy and Spain. Italy started the HS ball rolling by allowing private firm Italo to compete with Trenitalia. Italo website's homepage is more like that of an airline rather than a train firm. Its HS trains run from North to South, and have prompted Trenitalia to pull up its socks.

## ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Spain is even more interesting. To better utilise its HS network, Spain invited foreign operators to serve the network. Two operators, namely SNCF and Trenitalia, seized the opportunity. Initially both operators served the voluminous Madrid-Barcelona route but now they are starting to cover additional cities. Consequently, fares with all operators have fallen and consumers have benefitted. Renfe, whose previous HS services were efficient but somewhat pricey, responded with its own budget HS train branded Avlo.

Trainline has also been a beneficiary of this competition. Unlike the UK, where all train operators must display all other firms, the situation in mainland Europe is akin to the early days of airline computer booking systems. In other words, operators in mainland Europe are allowed to display their services only. It has meant travellers have flocked to independent sites for the full range of options. So while UK rail has still not fully recovered following the pandemic, Trainline's international sales (mainly in France, Italy and Spain) have grown by 81 per cent. BT

# An {extra}*ordinary* adventure awaits you

Reethi Beach boasts over 20-years of hospitality in the Maldives. Located in the idyllic Baa Atoll, it is the only UNESCO biosphere in the Maldivian archipelago. The island is a pioneer in the atoll for sustainable tourism and has recently been awarded the Green Globe Certification, demonstrating the long-term environmental commitments of the resort. It offers a wide array of timeless experiences, from swimming in the legendary Hanifaru Bay to catching a glimpse of gentle giants, the whale sharks that reside within the turquoise blue waters, promising true escapism and a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Our adventurous connoisseurs seek Reethi Beach Resort, not merely for its aura of a paradise island, but for the extraordinary way they feel when in residence here at our property. Reethi Beach Resort serves as an acclaimed oasis for travellers, guests and families alike.

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**WORDS** APRIL HUTCHINSON

## THE MALDIVES

Iconic scenes of overwater villas, turquoise-hued horizons that never end, curvaceous white beaches, and an unbelievable underwater world that leaves you feeling like you're part of a David Attenborough documentary are all part of the appeal of the Maldives, but there's even more to this country if you scratch beneath the surface.

People have been settling in the Maldives for 2,500 years, particularly from the Indian subcontinent, and the Maldivian language of Dhivehi has its origins in Sanskrit.

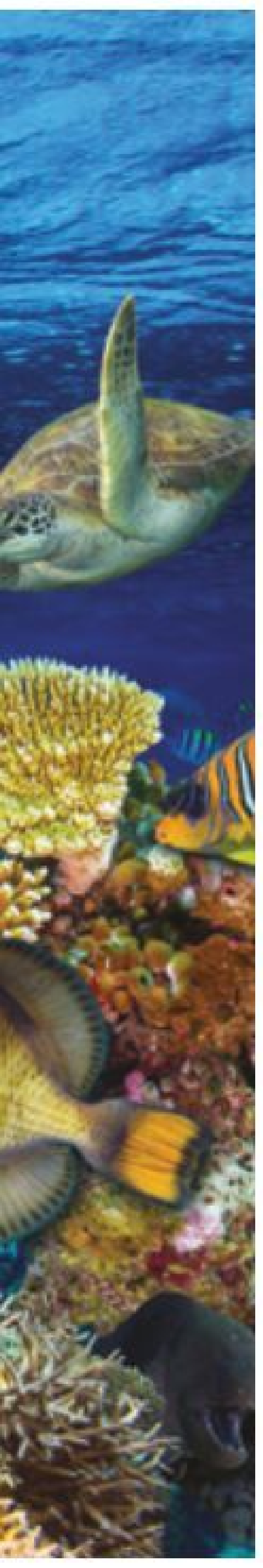
The garlanded islands sit on vital trade routes, making them a natural stopover for those transiting the world's oceans. This includes Abdul Barakat Yoosuf Al Barbary, who introduced Islam to the island nation in the 12th century, and whose tomb is a popular sightseeing spot in the small, densely-packed capital of Malé. As a Muslim country, the Friday Mosque in Malé is deemed the nation's most important heritage site. It is one of the largest coral stone buildings in the world and has been in continuous use since 1658.

Over on the island of Kaashidhoo – about two hours from Malé by speed boat – one of the country's largest archaeological sites reveals a Buddhist past, too. The excavated site of Kuruhinna Tharaagandu shows the ruins of an ancient Buddhist monastery complex, abandoned 900 years ago.

The place to tie everything together is the National Museum in Malé, built by China as a gift to the country. Among its treasures are examples of

# WINTER ESCAPES

They are some of the world's most beautiful islands, but the appeal of the Seychelles and Maldives goes beyond picture-perfect views



the lacquer-work boxes for which the Maldives is famous, along with the minutes of the famous underwater cabinet meeting held by President Nasheed in 2009 to highlight the issues of climate change and its impact on the country – some predict it may even disappear by 2050, given the islands' low-lying nature, with around 80 per cent of the landmass less than one metre above sea level.

The archipelago sweeps down 750km of the Indian Ocean with 1,190 coral islands lying within 26 ring-like atolls. Maldives' population nudges in at just under half a million, and a third of its people live in Malé, with the rest of the population living on 200 'inhabited' or 'local' islands – so-called to distinguish them from the 100 islands which house resorts. Nowhere else does the concept of 'one-island, one-resort' proliferate quite the way it does here, with everything from fun three-star options, to incredible ultra-luxury resorts with extravagant villas, top-notch dining, wow-factor wellness facilities and impeccable service, not to mention a plethora of underwater architectural feats – including suites, spas, wine cellars and restaurants.

> **Kuruhinna Tharaagandu shows the ruins of an ancient Buddhist monastery complex**

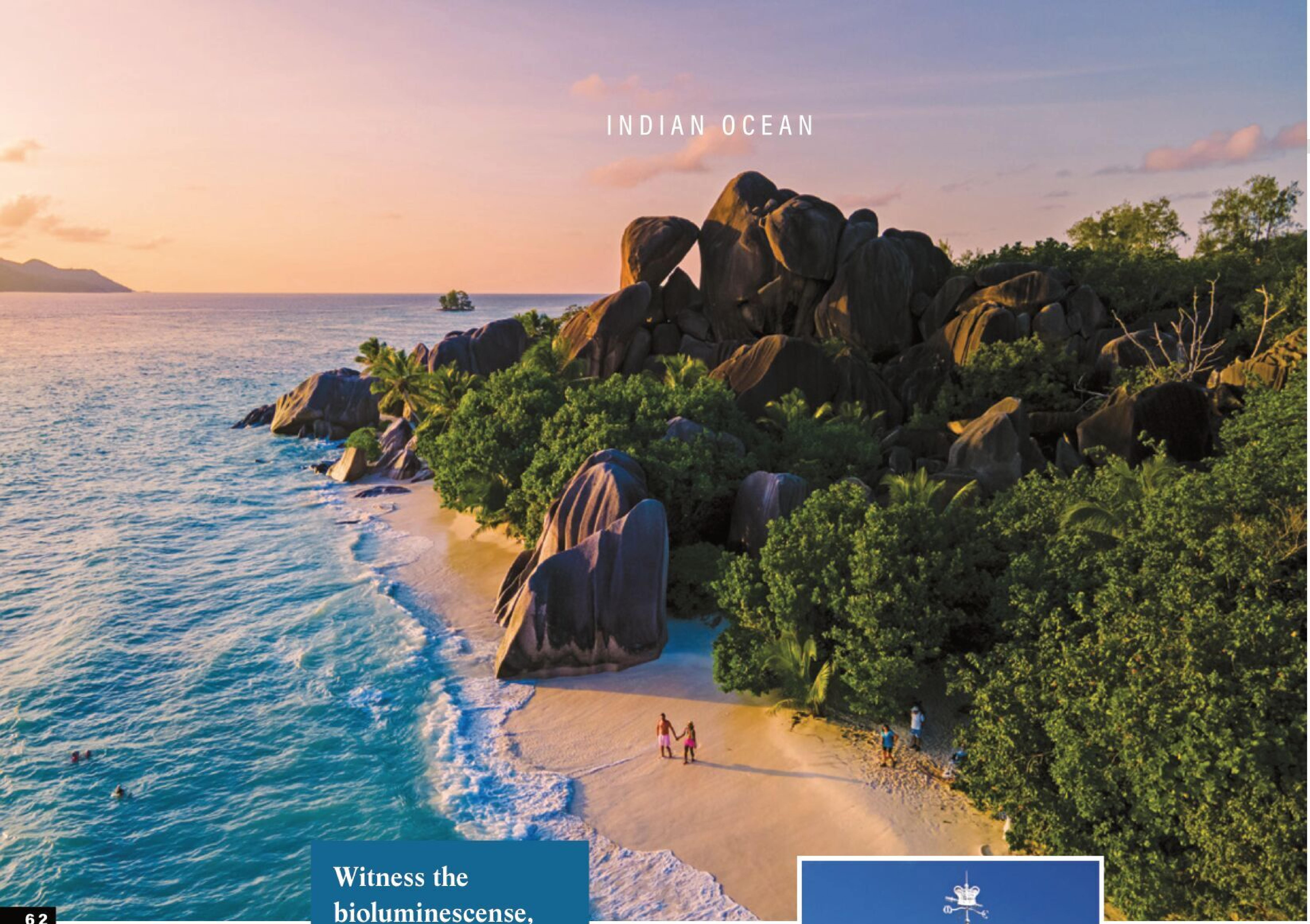
As much as 99 per cent of the Maldives' territory is water. Coral reefs provide natural protection for the islands, but they also bring the drama when it comes to diving and snorkelling, with brilliantly-coloured clownfish, triggerfish, lion fish and butterfly fish among the species darting in and out of these vast underwater gardens. Resorts often have marine biologists onsite, who spearhead projects to monitor and protect underwater life such as coral propagation, which is something you can often get involved in.

The Manta Trust shows the Maldives is home to the largest recorded reef manta ray population in the world, and these stunning, graceful giants are best seen in Hanifaru Bay, a marine-protected area in Baa Atoll, now a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Or you might prefer the magical sight of spotting a hawksbill or green sea turtle, and several resorts collaborate with The Olive Ridley Project to help accelerate its work on turtle research and rehabilitation. One other magnificent sea-based pursuit is trying to witness bioluminescence, where the surf

→

**TOP:**
Overwater villas perched in the Indian Ocean
**LEFT:**
Scuba diving in colourful coral reefs

FIGURNIY.COM, GRAFNER/ISTOCK



Witness the bioluminescense, where the surf sparkles and glows neon blue at night

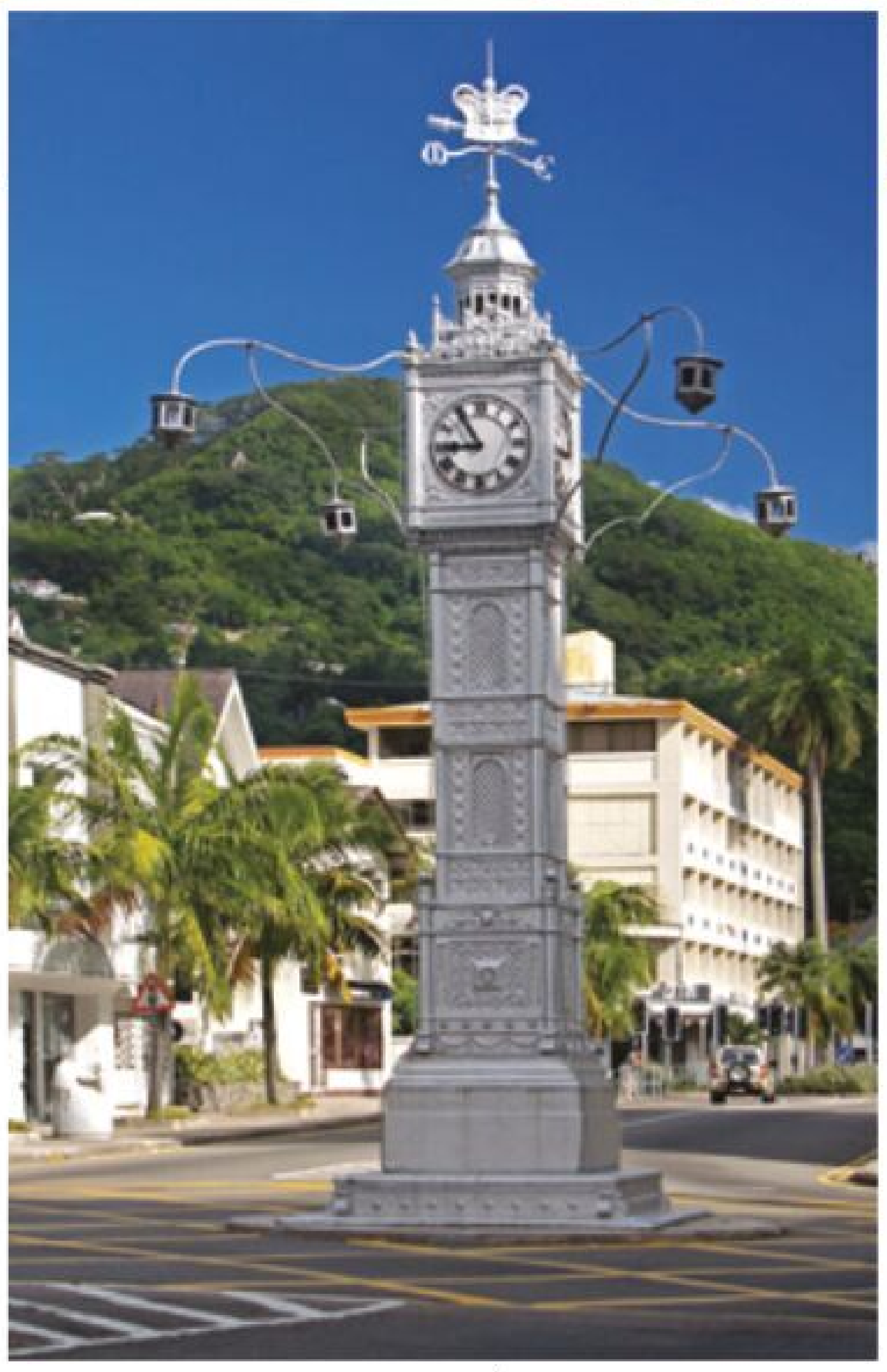
sparkles and glows neon blue at night. The island of Vaadhoo in Raa Atoll is commonly named as one of the best places to witness this nocturnal phenomenon.

The Maldives might not be the first place you think of for surfing, but it is home to what's billed as the "world's most luxurious surfing event" – the Four Seasons Maldives Surfing Champions Trophy, held in August with a US$25,000 prize. The most popular surf spots are around North Malé Atoll, while Huvadhoo Atoll in the south also boasts some well-known surf points; it's best to hit the surf between March and May, and September to November. December-April generally is the most reliable time weather-wise to visit the Maldives, but it's a year-round destination.

Fleets of seaplanes shuttle awe-inspired travellers around the Maldives from a dedicated terminal in Malé to chosen resorts, usually landing right next to the jetty of each; this scenic transfer can set you back anywhere from US$300 to US$900 for a round trip. The country also has domestic airports serving various atolls, and while not as exotic, these scheduled flights can make for a more comfortable experience than the hot, cramped seaplanes. There are plenty of resort islands within an hour's speedboat ride of Malé too, which makes for an easier arrival, so always consider the 'getting there' when you're sizing up the myriad resorts and their locations.

## SEYCHELLES

These two destinations may share the Indian Ocean, but they offer very different experiences. The Seychelles is made up of much larger islands – 115 of them, either hewn from granite or built up from coral – and has a much more vibrant local vibe. There is a degree of 'one-island, one-resort' here, but many of the country's high-end hotels can also be found on the largest island, mountainous Mahé, which is home to the capital Victoria as well as the international airport.



**TOP:** Anse Source d'Argent on La Digue
**ABOVE:** Little Big Ben

The British named the city after Queen Victoria and it has enough hustle and bustle to warrant your attention for a short visit, including 'Little Big Ben', as the Clock Tower has become known – it's actually a replica of one at Vauxhall Bridge in London – and the lively Sir Selwyn-Clarke Market, with its colourful corrugated roofs, and stallholders selling everything from catch-of-the-day to spices and souvenirs. Go there to mingle with the Seychellois who come to gossip and shop, or for an arty stop, make a visit to Kaz Zanana, a recently renovated gallery and café in a landmark 1900s building. Just as colourful as the market is the Arul →

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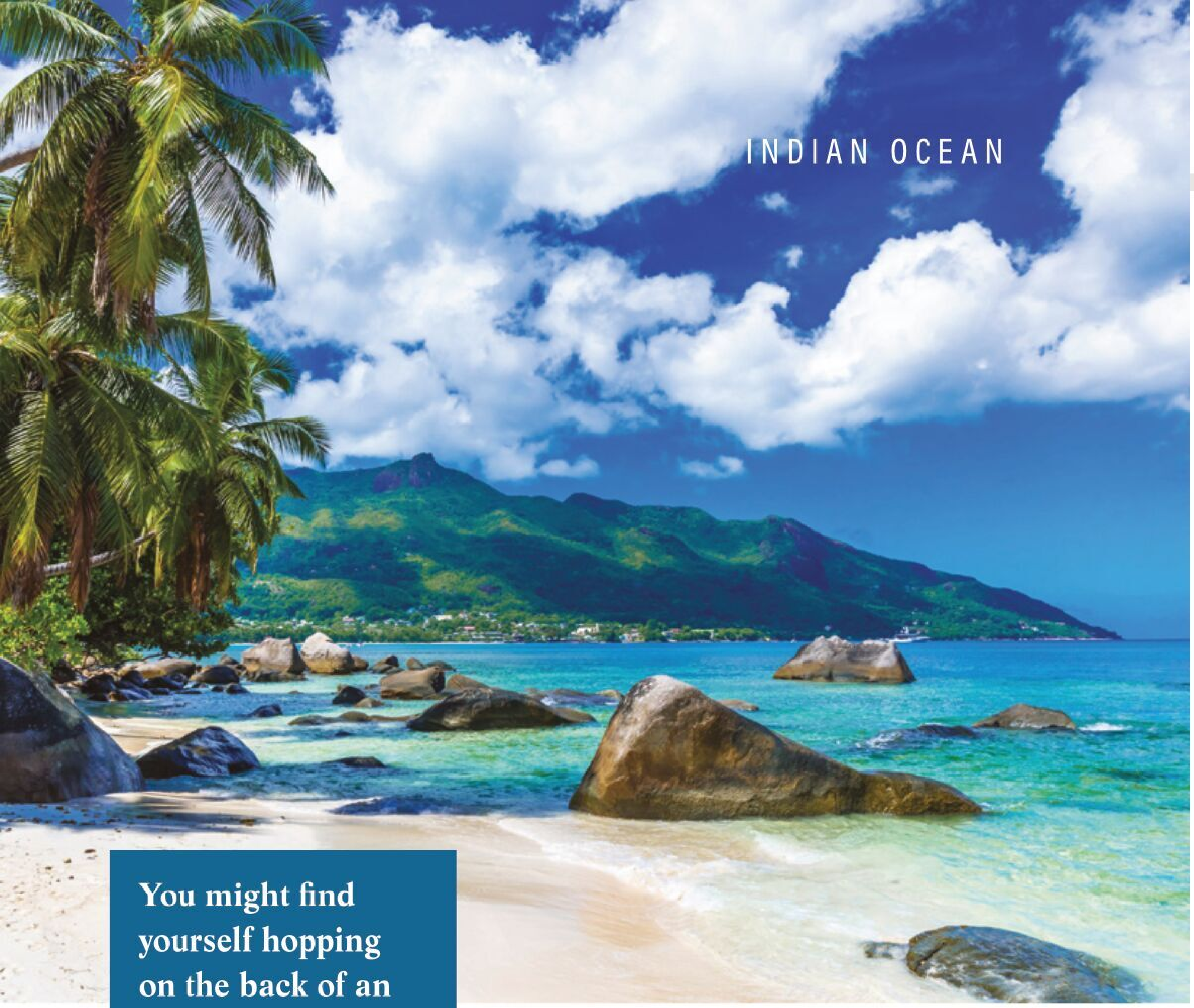


You might find yourself hopping on the back of an ox-drawn cart to get around

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Beau Vallon beach in Mahé; Aldabra giant tortoise; Arul Mihu Navasakthi Vinayagar Temple

Mihu Navasakthi Vinayagar Temple, the country's only Hindu temple.

Seychelles' charm lies in its relaxed, laid-back way of life and its natural raw beauty, a landscape that remains largely untouched and barely discovered, with relatively few tourists compared to its regional cousins, and less than 100,000 people who call this piece of paradise home.

The second largest island is Praslin, home to several hotels and an airport, as well as one of Seychelles' biggest claims to fame. It's said to be where Arab merchants and pirates used to come and hide their treasure in the 18th century, but also where you will find the primordial Vallée de Mai, a UNESCO-listed natural wonder that is home to the coco de mer palms, known for their incredibly large and erotic-looking seeds – the largest of all in the plant kingdom, weighing up to 20kg. Another island, that is often considered sleepy, is La Digue: its laid-back, infinitely tropical vibe a magnet for those taking a break from the rat race. You might find yourself hopping on the back of an ox-drawn cart to get around, although this is slowly dying out with the introduction of electric buggies.

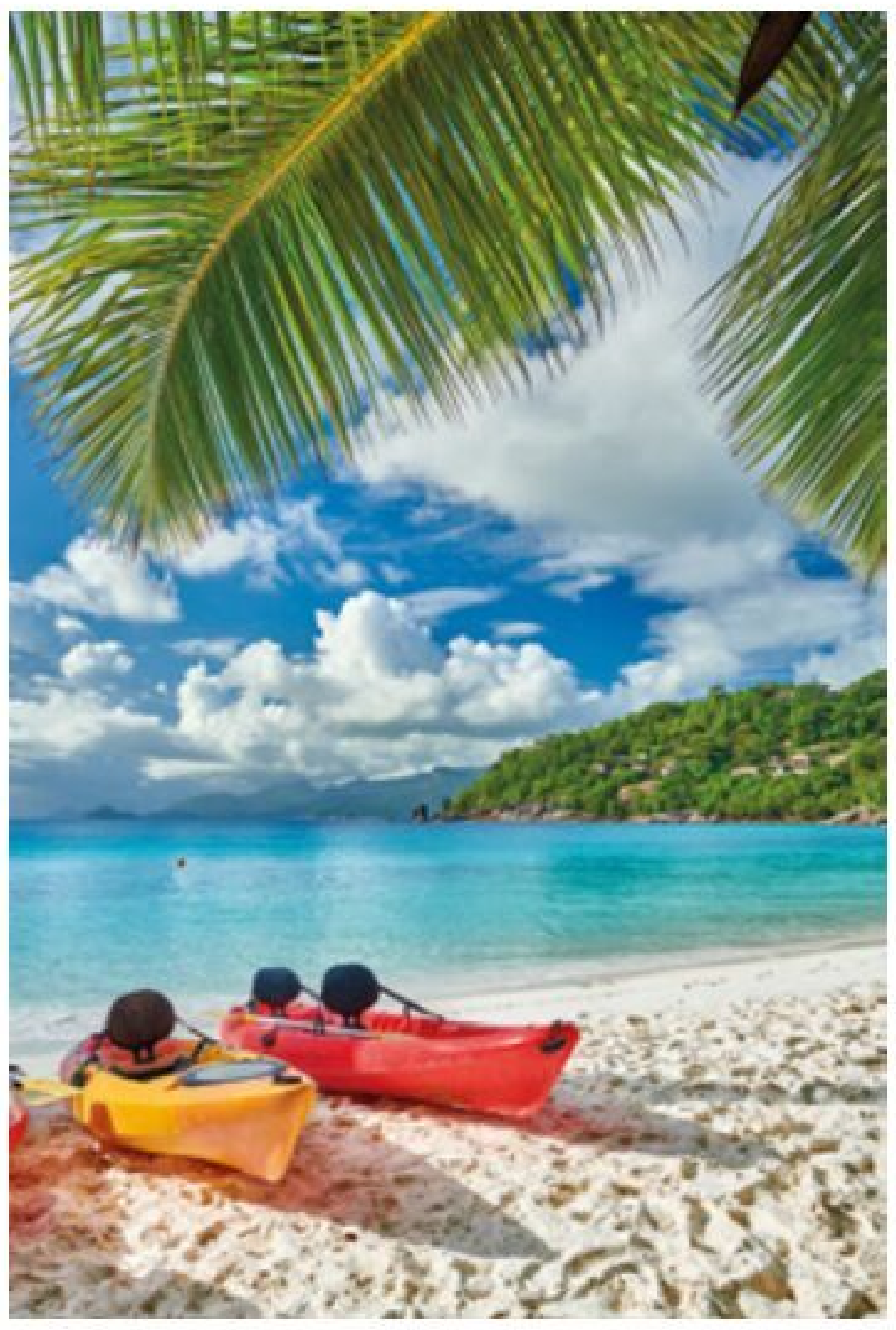
Many countries may claim it, but Seychelles really does have some of the world's best beaches, many looking as if a giant has dropped granite boulders into a bowl of flour and sprinkled them with bowing palms. Some of the finest examples on Mahé range from the ever-popular Beau Vallon, to the quieter Anse Intendance in the south, while one of the country's most iconic is Anse Source d'Argent on La Digue.

Seychelles was not really settled by humans until the 18th century, and many of the islands are still uninhabited. Society here has its roots mainly in Africa, with French, Canadian, Chinese and Arab influences; locals speak English, French and Creole – greet people with 'Bonzour' in the morning, and you might win a smile in return. A fun time to see the country come alive is October, when Creole crafts, music, dance and delicious cuisine is celebrated during Festival Kreol. One of the many features of creole culture is Moutya, a dance that was added to UNESCO's list of intangible heritage in 2021, becoming the first cultural tradition of the island nation to receive such recognition. Brought to Seychelles by African slaves who arrived with French settlers, it was used as a psychological comfort in their harsh lives, as they would come together to dance, drum and sing at the end of a hard day's work.

One prized place is Aldabra Atoll, home to as many as 150,000 eponymous giant tortoises, the world's largest population of this reptile. Aldabra is around 1,120km from Mahé and, thanks to its isolation, has been protected from human influence with access to this UNESCO World Heritage Site still tightly restricted, but there are a few cruise options that could get you there. Also nearby, however, are the Astove and Cosmoledo atolls, which are achingly beautiful, like an other-worldly paradise, and more easily accessible. Beaches, culture and nature – the Seychelles has it all. BT

SIMON DANNHAUER, VUK8691, ITTIPON2002/ISTOCK

The Seychelles Islands



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4 HOURS IN...

# TEL AVIV

**WORDS** TOM OTLEY

Munch your way around Tel Aviv's markets before feasting your eyes on art, architecture, and coastline views

### 1 CARMEL MARKET

The food in Israel is outstanding, created from the freshest fruit and vegetables and catering for sweet-toothed locals and tourists alike with favourites like *baklava* and *halva*. Avoid your hotel breakfast and head off to Carmel Market. Once there, weigh up whether your luggage has room for a selection of dried fruit – dates, prunes, figs, apricots, raisins, cranberries, peaches and mangoes are all good, then get distracted by a dozen-plus varieties of olives. While you decide, have a *boureka*, a baked pastry with a variety of fillings though most often a combination of cheese, spinach, potato and mushrooms. You can buy for take away and eat while you walk or find a café – Kiortosh (11 HaCarmel Street) is a good bet, and you can watch the baking taking place through the window. **kiortosh.co.il**

### 2 LEVINSKY MARKET

Close to Carmel is another market, running along Levinsky Street. It offers a similar range of produce to Carmel market, but with perhaps a greater emphasis on spices – check out the Tavlinsky store (tavlinsky.co.il) – as well as Iranian food. If you are thirsty, try Gazoz Cafe at 41 Levinsky. 'Gazoz' means sparkling water, but here it is taken to a different level, with a range of soft drinks created by charismatic entrepreneur, Benny Briga. Fizzy water (soda or seltzer, in other words) combined with fruits – both fresh and fermented, plus spices, herbs and homemade syrups, served over ice. **bennybriga.com**

### 3 YEMENI BREAD

Yemenite Jews immigrated to Israel in various waves throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, eventually numbering 400,000 in Israel. The largest influx was in 1949 when a series of airlifts – eventually known as Operation Magic Carpet – brought some 50,000 Yemeni Jews to Israel in just a few months. Today the area where many settled is known as the Yemenite Quarter (Kerem HaTeimanim), and there is nowhere better to taste some *lahoh*, a sort of spongy Yemeni bread, not unlike thick pancakes, baked on the spot with a variety of fillings. Aim for the Yemeni Bakery, and if you want an expert guide for these markets, try local company the Eager Tourist. **eagertourist.com**

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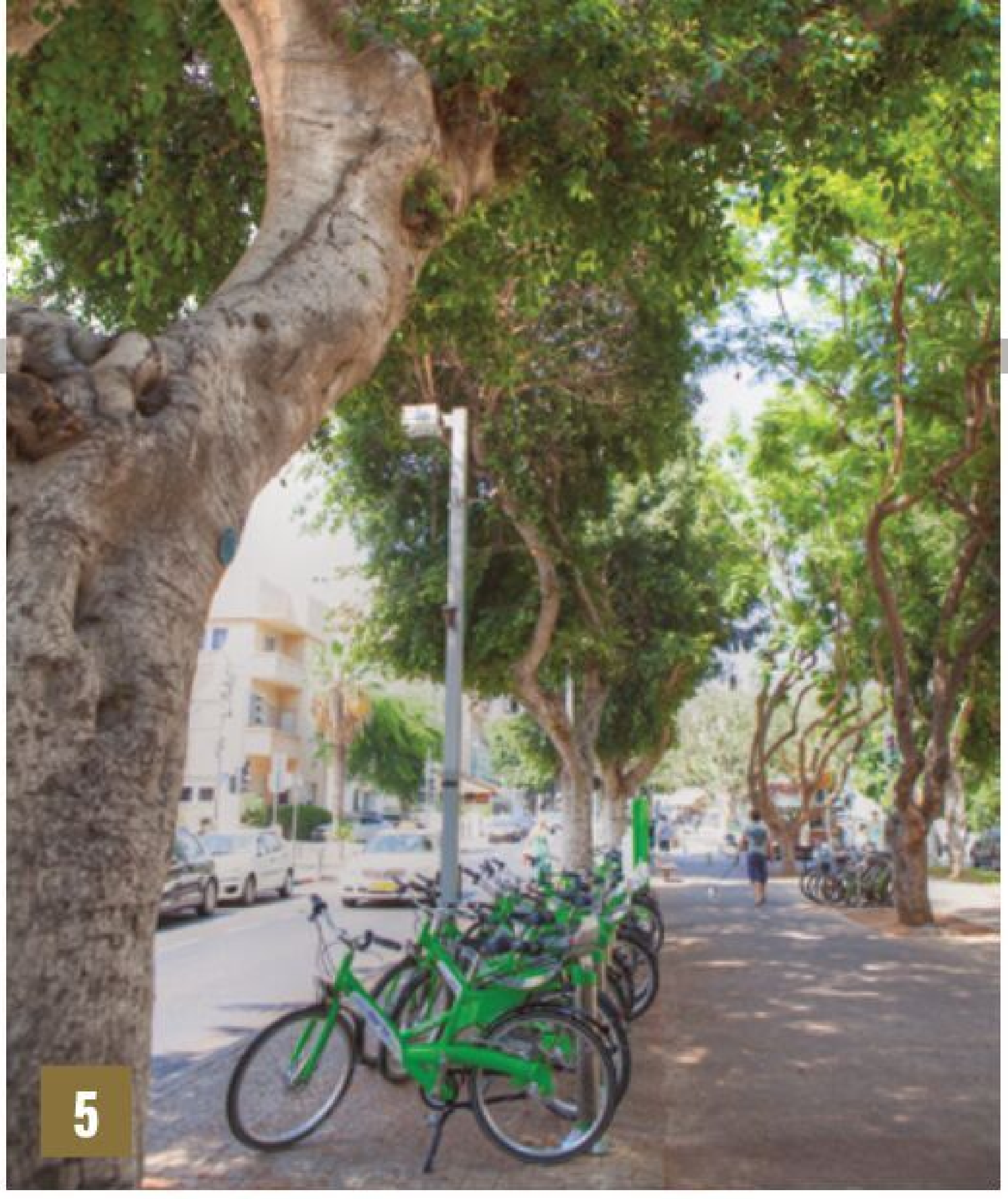


### 4 BAUHAUS CENTRE

Tel Aviv is a modern city, with origins in the 1920s and 1930s and with a noticeable Bauhaus and International Style to its central commercial and residential area. Visit the Esther Cinema, now the Cinema Hotel, on Dizengoff Square. This was designed by female architect Genia Averbuch (born in Ukraine), who won a competition for the design of the square and surrounding buildings in 1934. Tel Aviv was declared a UNESCO site in 2003, and ever since the 'White City' has been marketed as the place where European architects came to create a new world free from persecution. It's actually a more complicated and political story, so drop into the Bauhaus Center. They have guided and self-guided audio tours, books, maps, posters, tea towels and models – perfect for presents for those back at home. **bauhaus-center.com**

### 5 MODERN ART

Tel Aviv has a burgeoning art scene, and a visit to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art is a must. There are also dozens of private galleries where you can view art for sale, with more opening every year. One new gallery is Nassima Landau, established by a former curator of both the Israel Museum and the Tel Aviv Museum, and Steeve Nassima, a collector and expert on the works of Yayoi Kusama. Its exhibitions present contemporary international art in several rooms, a short walk from the shaded ficus tree-lined Rothschild Boulevard. **nassimalandau.com**

### 6 THE BEACH

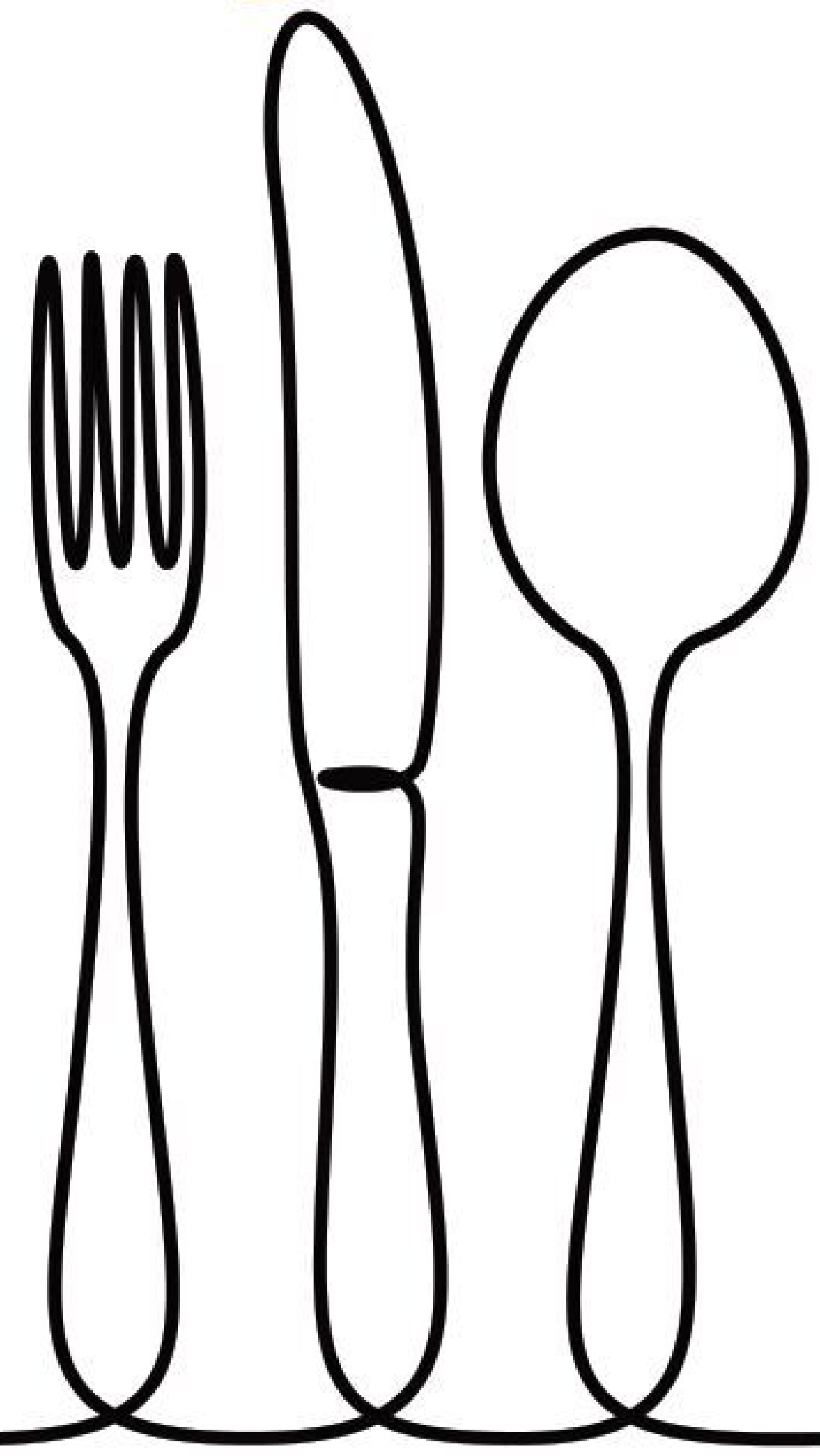
Tel Aviv is best known for its beach, and whatever the time of year a walk along Shlomo Lahat Promenade is a real eye-opener. You don't have to be young and gorgeous to jog, roller skate or e-scooter wearing next to nothing, but it certainly helps and the evidence is clear that Tel Aviv is LGBTQ-friendly (and home to the largest Pride parade in the Middle East and Africa). There are open-air gyms on the beach, but better to watch others playing beach volleyball while you find somewhere serving drinks to watch the sun set into the Mediterranean and plan your next day. If you still have energy, you could head ten minutes south and check out the night markets of Jaffa, or perhaps leave that for another day... BT

SIMON GOETZ, LEVI MEIR CLANCY/UNSPLASH; LENAZAP, ANNA BRYUKHANOVA, 2014 WOLFGANG GEPP/ISTOCK; DANA FRIEDLANDER

THE
JAFFA
TEL AVIV

# Dine in style

Tickle your tastebuds in one of these renowned upmarket restaurants



**LONDON** ITALIAN

## THEO RANDALL AT THE INTERCONTINENTAL

InterContinental London Park Lane houses the capital's best Italian restaurant; Theo Randall at the InterContinental. Chef Theo Randall carefully blends the best local ingredients with hand-picked Italian imports to create rustic fare that continues to attract rave reviews. While he is a regular on national television, including BBC One's, Saturday Kitchen, Theo remains true to his culinary roots and is at the restaurant for most services. The daily-changing menu is inspired by his regular trips to Italy and dictated by the best seasonal ingredients available from the market every day.

■ One Hamilton Place, Park Lane, W1J 7QY London ■ parklane.intercontinental.com
■ **theorandall.reception@ihg.com** ■ **+44 (0)207 409 3131**

**LONDON** CHINESE

## TATTU

Tattu London sits proudly on the rooftop of The Now Building, offering scintillating views of the city. Tattu delivers contemporary Chinese cuisine, fusing traditional flavours with modern cooking methods, paired with exquisite presentation, to create a unique and innovative dining experience. The restaurant also features the spectacular Phoenix bar and outdoor terrace, where guests can enjoy an expertly mixed cocktail before dinner against the backdrop of the London skyline.

■ The Now Building, Outernet, London, WC2H 0LA
■ tattulondon.com ■ **london@tattu.co.uk** ■ **+44 (0)20 3778 1985**

**LONDON** FUSION

## TAKA MARYLEBONE

Having opened in September 2020 to critical acclaim and rave reviews from restaurant critics Grace Dent, Giles Coren and Fay Maschler, TAKA Marylebone serves a seasonal small plates-led menu that showcases the finest of British produce using traditional Japanese techniques and recipes. Focusing on hot and grilled dishes as well as rolls, TAKA's menu is overseen by executive chef Taiji Maruyama, who was previously of Beaverbrook in Surrey, Nobu London and Ginza Koyju Restaurant.

■ 109 Marylebone High Street, London W1U 4RX ■ takalondon.com
■ **marylebone@takalondon.com** ■ **+44 (0)203 637 4466**

**LONDON** INDIAN

## KAHANI

For decades, Indian food in Britain has remained largely unchanged, but Kahani chef Peter Joseph is revolutionising Indian cuisine. Gone are the weighty sauces, replaced with light dishes of grilled meats, fish and vegetables from the robata grill and tandoor. The finest seasonal and traditional British ingredients are brought to life using special Indian culinary techniques. The result is the very best in Indian food, with meals so delicious diners will want to share – creating a sense of communal eating which is the hallmark of superior cuisine.

■ Kahani, 1 Wilbraham Place, London SW1X 9AE ■ kahanilondon.com
■ **reservations@kahanilondon.com** ■ **+44 (0)20 7730 7634**

**LONDON** JAPANESE

## GINZA ST JAMES

Ginza St James's is the impressive contemporary Japanese restaurant featuring a chic bar and main dining room along with two private rooms and three specialist counters – teppanyaki, robata, and sushi. Highlights of the extensive menu include spicy tuna tartare, Kobe gyu, black cod saikyo yaki, Kagoshima Wagyu beef, and lobster tail with ponzu, as well as sushi and sashimi platters for sharing. There is also a weekday set lunch sharing menu. The drinks list features 70 sakes, 300 wines and a cocktail list of classic and inventive options incorporating Japanese ingredients.

■ 15 Bury St, St. James's, London SW1Y 6AL ■ ginza-stjames.com
■ **reservations@ginza-stjames.com** ■ **+44 (0)207 839 1101**

**LONDON** SPANISH

## EL PIRATA

El Pirata has been serving acclaimed Spanish tapas alongside its prodigious wine list for over 28 years and couples the comforting appeal of a central London establishment with the energetic dynamism of a new opening. Walking distance from both Hyde Park and Green Park, El Pirata offers true escapism so that you feel like you're in Madrid rather than Mayfair. In a city famous for its hidden gems, this one is hiding in plain sight.

■ 5-6 Down Street, Mayfair, London W1J 7AQ ■ elpirata.co.uk
■ **bookings@elpirata.co.uk** ■ **+44 (0)20 7491 3810**

**LONDON** BRITISH

## MADDOX TAVERN

Maddox Tavern is a neighbourhood restaurant and bar that's worth travelling for. Located in the heart of Mayfair, the building is steeped in history and adorned with rich mahogany throughout, including in its four discrete dining rooms, providing an elegant setting for relaxed dining whatever the occasion. The seasonal menus are built around the very best produce from the British Isles, taking guests from breakfast through to lunch and dinner, with a three course set menu also available. There's an exceptional wine list to match, accompanied by a range of impeccable cocktails.

■ 47 Maddox St, London W1S 2PG ■ maddoxtavern.com
■ **reservations@maddoxtavern.com** ■ **+44 (0)203 376 9922**

**LONDON** BRITISH/FRENCH

## BOB BOB RICARD CITY

Bob Bob Ricard City is the modern, glamorous restaurant in Leadenhall's 'cheesegrater' building. Well-known for its now iconic 'Press for Champagne' button at each booth table, there is also an exceptional wine list, with notably modest mark-ups. Chef Director Ben Hobson oversees the menu of signature British and French dishes, from Caviar to Beef Wellington, Lobster Mac'n'Cheese, and Duck Confit – a range of luxury comfort food for business or private dining. Service is superbly professional, friendly, and knowledgeable. Three private dining rooms (for up to 18) are ideal for either meetings or social celebrations.

■ Level 3, 122 Leadenhall Street, City of London, EC3V 4AB ■ bobbobricard.com
■ **city.reservations@bobbobricard.com** ■ **+44 (0) 203 145 1000**

PRESS FOR
CHAMPAGNE

**LONDON** WEST AFRICAN

## ISIBANI

Isibani, a Zulu word meaning 'bring the light,' is a love letter to West African cuisine and the co-founders, Anthony Douglas Chuka and Abdul Malik Abubakar, mother's Ibo Nigerian heritage. Located in the heart of Knightsbridge, Isibani is a hidden gem which delves into traditional recipes and ingredients to deliver an authentic and contemporary dining experience inspired by the food and culture of Africa. Isibani is the perfect and long-awaited addition to London's West African fine dining experience.

■ 9 Knightsbridge Green, London SW1X 7QL ■ isibani.com
■ **eat@isibani.com** ■ **+44 (0)207 584 3726**

**LONDON** SOUTH EAST ASIAN

## STRAITS KITCHEN

Embracing a respectful approach to cooking inspired by heritage recipes, the menu at Straits Kitchen showcases a melting pot of South East Asian cuisines represented in multicultural Singapore. Serving breakfast, lunch, dinner, and Sunday Asian roast, the restaurant features floor-to-ceiling glass windows overlooking the Plaza, while two private dining rooms enable guests to enjoy a selection of set menus to suit all tastes and occasions. Straits Kitchen also showcases over 200 bottles of Champagne.

■ 80 Houndsditch, London, EC3A 7AB, United Kingdom
■ panpacificlondon.com
■ **dining.pplon@panpacific.com** ■ **+44 (0)20 7118 6888**

**LONDON** ARMENIAN

## LUSIN

Lusin is an authentic Armenian restaurant with cuisine influenced by Eastern Europe and the Levant. Created by Mira Foods, it is the first Armenian restaurant in London. Lusin means "moon" in Armenian. The authentic dishes were created by Madam Anahid Doniguian. The menu has been curated by two Michelin-star chef Marcel Ravin. Lusin's mission is to evoke a sense of beauty, through an inspired rich atmosphere, taking the guests on a journey celebrating old traditions and introducing new tastes.

■ 16-17 Hay Hill, Mayfair, London, W1J 8NY ■ lusinrestaurant.com/mayfair
■ **info@lusinrestaurant.co.uk** ■ **+44 (0)7384 339370**

**MANCHESTER** CHINESE

## TATTU

Located in the heart of Manchester's Spinningfields district, Tattu is a multi-sensory dining experience, serving elevated modern Chinese cuisine. It takes guests on a unique culinary journey in award-winning interiors and offers three dining experiences: the intimate Parlour room and the Rose Garden, both of which are situated on the ground floor, as well as the main restaurant which features the iconic cherry blossom tree taking centre stage and turning icy blue for winter. Dishes range from handcrafted dim sum to indulgent large dishes all perfect for sharing.

■ 3 Hardman Square, Gartside Street, Spinningfields, Manchester, M3 3EB
■ tattu.co.uk ■ **manchester@tattu.co.uk** ■ **+44 161 819 2060**

**DUBLIN** FINE DINING

## SUESEY STREET

Suesey Street is a fine dining restaurant located in Dublin City Centre offering amazing, contemporary Irish cuisine. Locality in every bite, a taste of home in every mouthful. Having operated restaurants in Dublin since 2006, the Kelly family have spent the last 14 years supporting local suppliers and other small family businesses. Placing an emphasis on seasonality and locality, Suesey Street aims to offer its guests the best in contemporary Irish food and an unrivalled warmth and welcome that only a family business can provide.

■ 26 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2, Ireland ■ sueseystreet.ie
■ **info@sueseystreet.ie** ■ **+353 (1) 669 4600** ■ **@sueseystreet**

**EDINBURGH** WORLD

## BONNIE & WILD

Bonnie & Wild is a welcoming and stylish food hall in central Edinburgh that features some of Scotland's best chefs and restaurants. Within this 370-seater venue, you'll find ten food stalls plus three bars, a café and boutique bottleshop. Enjoy menus from Masterchef: The Professionals winner Gary Maclean, celebrity chef Jimmy Lee, UK's best burger El Perro Negro and UK Street Food Award-winners Kochchi, plus much more. Close to Waverley Station and the tramline, it's a must-try for visitors to Edinburgh.

■ St James Quarter (Level 4), Edinburgh EH1 3AE ■ bonnieandwildmarket.com
■ **hello@bonnieandwildmarket.com** ■ **+44 (0)131 560 1800**

**VIENNA** BRASSERIE

## THE BANK BRASSERIE & BAR

The Bank Brasserie & Bar is located in the historical cashiering hall of the 100-year-old bank building and presents a varied menu and exceptional dining experience in a warm atmosphere. The Bank Brasserie focuses on newly interpreted brasserie classics, using sustainable locally sourced ingredients. The open show kitchen allows diners to watch and follow the chefs preparing tasty menus using high-quality products. The Bank Bar presents specially created international premium cocktails based on sensorial and optical associations with the former cashier hall.

■ Bognergasse 4, 1010 Vienna, Austria ■ restaurant-thebank.com
■ **restaurant-thebank.vienna@hyatt.com** ■ **+43 1 22740 1236**

## BUDAPEST

INTERNATIONAL

### PARISI PASSAGE CAFÉ & BRASSERIE

The Parisi Passage Café & Brasserie is located in the stunning award-winning building of the iconic Parisi Udvar. The enchanting environment, reminiscent of the last century, immediately captivates everyone. The restaurant soon became a favorite place of the local public and is characterized by an endless, lively life. Recommended for those for whom high, uncompromising quality is as essential as a relaxed dining experience. The menu is an exciting fusion of traditional Hungarian, French and international cuisine.

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■ 1053 Budapest, Ferenciek tere 10. - Párisi Udvar Hotel Budapest ■ parisipassage.hu/en ■ **info@parisipassage.hu** ■ **+36 70 702 4088**

## ROME

ITALIAN FINE DINING

### FOLLIE

Michelin-starred chef Luciano Monosilio redefines the concept of Italian fine dining at Follie, fusing art and cuisine to create a new concept. Located in Rome's leading urban luxury resort, Villa Agrippina Gran Melia, it is the place to surrender to the perfect pasta, to clear, earthy flavours and to ingredients of ancient origins that go back to the Roman Empire times. Follie is open on Tuesdays to Saturdays for dinner only, featuring a six and twelve-course tasting menu and à la carte.

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■ Via del Gianicolo 3, Rome ■ melia.com
■ **follie@melia.com** ■ **+39 06 92590830**

## ZURICH

MODERN MEDITERRANEAN

### RESTAURANT WEISSES ROSSLI

At the restaurant Weisses Rossli you will find authentic and seasonal cuisine, served in a relaxing atmosphere by a team of friendly yet dedicated professionals. While somewhat inconspicuous from the outside, the Weisses Rossli greets guests with a warm and welcoming interior. It is listed in the Guide Michelin and GaultMillau has awarded the Swiss chef de cuisine Mathieu Bacon 14 points. But that's not what drives him. He cooks from the heart – to the joy of all guests, vegetarians and vegans alike.

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■ Restaurant Weisses Rossli, Bederstrasse 96, 8002 Zurich ■ weisses-roessli.ch
■ **info@weisses-roessli.ch** ■ **+41 44 212 63 00**

## STOCKHOLM

NORDIC

### ADAM/ALBIN

Adam/Albin offers a contemporary Swedish restaurant experience far from the traditional fine dining restaurant. It is inspired by all the world's great cooking but the base of its cuisine is from the Swedish gastronomic heritage. Experience its delicious menu based on the kitchen's passion for outstanding produce. Adam/Albin is a Michelin one star restaurant and has won several awards since opening in 2016. It has become a top destination for foodies from all around the world.

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■ Radmansgatan 16, Stockholm, 114 25 ■ **adamalbin.se**
■ **restaurang@adamalbin.se** ■ **+46 (0)8 411 55 35**

**HAMBURG** HEIMATJUWEL

## RESTAURANT HEIMATJUWEL

Situated in the North West of Hamburg, the restaurant Heimatjuwel offers a modern, casual fine dining experience. Inspired by his love for regional products, their colours and flavours, Marcel Görke creates unique seasonal degustation menus. The focus is on a vegetarian cuisine using local products from small suppliers - farm to table. Just as much importance is attached to the selection of wines, especially natural wines. Enjoy the colourful diversity of the Heimatjuwel cuisine.

■ Stellinger Weg 47, Hamburg, 20255 ■ heimatjuwel.de
■ **info@heimatjuwel.de** ■ **+49 4042106989**

**BARCELONA** STEAKHOUSE

## MR PORTER

Exploring the fine line between pleasure and temptation, MR PORTER presents a unique concept that naturally combines the excellent offer of a modern steakhouse with the high energy vibe of a contemporary bar and lounge. An incomparably innovative culinary experience, where extremes act as protagonists; extravagant yet modest, urban yet familiar, wild yet obedient. MR PORTER Barcelona is a unique specimen of its kind. Transforming from an elegant setting by day, to a lively bar and lounge by nightfall, the impasse from food to cocktails is part of its DNA.

■ Carrer del Rossello, 265, 08008 Barcelona ■ mrportersteakhouse.com/barcelona
■ **@mrporter_official** ■ **info@mrportersteakhouse.es** ■ **+34 932 71 12 45**

**FRANKFURT** FRENCH

## LE PETIT ROYAL FRANKFURT

Located on the ground floor of the AMERON Frankfurt Neckarvillen Boutique Hotel, Le Petit Royal Frankfurt is characterised by elegant ambience, known from its Berlin counterpart – custom upholstered furniture, complemented by classic glass Ikora lamps and select contemporary art pieces. The seasonal menu offers regional and international steak cuts, fresh fish and modern French classics, accompanied by an extensive wine list with a focus on German and French positions and homemade sauces and sides.

■ Neckarstraße 13, 60329 Frankfurt am Main ■ lepetitroyal-frankfurt.de/en
■ **office@lepetitroyal-frankfurt.de** ■ **+49 (0)69 75 666 250**

**SINGAPORE** MEDITERRANEAN

## ARTEMIS GRILL & SKY BAR

Artemis Grill & Sky Bar, a 40th floor sky-high dining concept in Singapore's central business district, offers indoor and al fresco dining overlooking panoramic Marina Bay skyline views. With ever-changing lunch and dinner menus inspired by the diverse culinary heritage of the Mediterranean, the kitchen serves fresh food using only the best ingredients at their seasonal peak. Understanding diversity and individuality, the menu always caters for most food tribes, be they vegetarians, pescatarians, gluten-sensitive, low-carb'ers and carnivores.

■ 138 Market Street, CapitaGreen Rooftop (Level 40), Singapore 048946
■ artemisgrill.com.sg ■ **enquiries@artemisgrill.com.sg** ■ **+65 6635 8677**

## HONG KONG

ITALIAN

### GRISSINI

Named after its famous freshly baked bread sticks, Grissini offers refined authentic flavours from the Campania region in southern Italy, artisanally crafted by Chef de Cuisine Valerio Mandile with inspiration from his hometown and childhood memories in Naples. Using the freshest produce, Chef Valerio takes a creative approach to traditional Italian cuisine prepared with simplicity to perfection. The restaurant's convivial, unpretentious ambience and its passionate and personable service also contribute to a memorable dining experience.

■ 2/F, Grand Hyatt Hong Kong, 1 Harbour Road, Hong Kong
■ hongkong.grand.hyattrestaurants.com/restaurants-and-bars/grissini
■ **fbsc.hkggh@hyatt.com** ■ **+852 2584 7722**

## DUBAI

CHINESE

### TAN CHA

Since bounding onto the Dubai dining scene in February 2022, Tan Cha has been in the inaugural Dubai Michelin Guide and continues to set a new benchmark for contemporary Chinese cuisine in the city. The brainchild of restaurateur Alberto Barbieri, Tan Cha is an exploration of the new and the forgotten, the hidden and the secret. Spanning five dining areas, the seductive space invites diners on a sensory journey, pairing chef David Pang's exceptional Chinese cuisine with an inspired drink offering and an alluring after-hours programme, complete with a curated soundtrack.

■ JW Marriott Marquis Hotel, Business Bay, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
■ tanchadubai.com ■ **reservations@tanchadubai.com** ■ **+971 56 681 8881**

## VIETNAM

JAPANESE-FRENCH

### OKU

Oku is the purest expression of Regent Phu Quoc's Taste Gallery - an enchanting contemporary Japanese-French restaurant showcasing the finest techniques and ingredients of both worlds. The concept is an innovative addition to Vietnam's culinary scene, with both Salon de Boeuf and an Omakase Atelier, offering guests the finest culinary creations with a meticulous attention to detail, from food to interior. Oku is situated on the ground floor at Regent Phu Quoc, and it offers diners a choice of two private rooms, an Omakase Atelier, as well as indoor and outdoor seating options.

■ Phu Quoc Island, Vietnam ■ phuquoc.regent hotels.com/dining/oku
■ **dining.regentpq@ihg.com** ■ **+84 297 388 0000**

## BOSTON

MEDITERRANEAN INSPIRED

### BAMBARA KITCHEN & BAR

Creativity and innovation go hand in hand at Bambara, where a Mediterranean-inspired menu is influenced by the exploration of different cuisines and flavour profiles. Using farm-fresh and local, seasonal ingredients, chef Adam Resnick's food is critically acclaimed and locally loved. Located at the entrance to Cambridge and steps from vibrant Kendall Square, Bambara offers breakfast, brunch or dinner and is ideally suited for social and corporate events with a semi-private mezzanine overlooking the dining room and a dynamic exhibition kitchen.

■ Kimpton Marlowe Hotel, 25 Edwin H. Land Boulevard, Cambridge, MA 02141
■ bambara-cambridge.com
■ **info@bambara-cambridge.com** ■ **+01 617-868-4444**

Business Traveller

# the Report

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# Virgin Atlantic A330 neo Upper Class

## LONDON–TAMPA

**BACKGROUND** Virgin has ordered a total of 16 A330 neo aircraft for its long-haul operations, configured, at least initially, in three classes: economy, premium economy and business (Upper Class). The 'neo' stands for new engine option (in this case, Rolls Royce Trent 7000 engines), which along with improvements to the wing deliver an 11 per cent improvement in fuel efficiency over the existing A330 aircraft in Virgin's fleet, and a 50 per cent improvement in noise.

This was the inaugural flight to Tampa, which started in November, initially four times a week before becoming daily from November 28, 2022. The normal departure time is 1330, but this flight left at 0800 to allow for a press conference on arrival.

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS** I arrived by taxi at London Heathrow T3 at 0600 for my 0800 departure on VS129, with a flight time of ten-and-a-half hours. I had hand luggage only and had already checked in online, so after getting my boarding card at the Upper Class check-in counter I took the lift up to the Upper Class security and was quickly airside and on my way to the lounge.

**THE LOUNGE** The Virgin Club House normally opens at 0630, but because of our earlier flight it opened at 0600. We had a reception with breakfast in the far left-hand corner, and though we were among the first to arrive, by the time we left to board at 0715 the lounge was filling up. As an aside, unlike some other airlines, Virgin rightly thinks there is a value in providing magazines and newspapers for its guests.

**BOARDING** Boarding from Gate 16 was swift with two air bridges. I entered from the front door and turned right into the cabin to get to my seat 3G.

**THE SEAT** The A330 is too narrow to fit Virgin's new Upper Class seat, as seen on its A350s, so it has chosen an off-the-shelf seat – the Thompson Vantage XL – which is the same seat its sister airline Delta has on its A330s, along with many other airlines.

The seats are all forward facing in a 1-2-1 configuration of A-DG-K. The seat reclines fully flat with the legroom for the bed being enclosed under the table of the passenger in front. This staggered formation is a common arrangement, though it means that legroom when fully reclined can be quite tight. The airline has distinguished itself by design elements such as the Virgin deep purple/burgundy colour scheme, the sliding privacy door and the move away from leather in favour of a material which is up to 50 per cent lighter and uses no animal products in its manufacture.

The seat design for the cabin (and the whole interior of the aircraft) is called, internally, 'New Horizon', with stitched lines on the seats, subtle horizontal lines up to the lumbar region on the seat, and a burgundy mesh pattern in the surrounding areas of the seat. There is also mood lighting that changes with each stage of the journey.

Although the seats are fairly standard, there are a pair of middle seats in the front row (D and G) which have garnered all the headlines and which Virgin calls 'The Retreat'. These two seats will be sold at a premium for couples or those wanting a more roomy experience. They have more storage room, including an area under the side table in-between the seats.

Each seat has a large side table, which has enough room for a laptop if you want to work and then place it to one side when the meal service arrives. There is a tray table that comes out from under this side table, but it is not very robust, vibrating up and down when working on a laptop.

> There is mood lighting that changes with each stage of the journey

There is a wireless charging area just above the power, but it was temperamental so I plugged in to one of the USB charging points (there is both USB A and USB C). There is also AC power (universal) for charging larger devices such as a laptop. We had a Virgin Atlantic engineer onboard for our flight home, so I know there are a few teething issues with some of the design elements and power, but Virgin is fixing this and hopefully any problems should be sorted by the time you fly.

As already mentioned, there is a full privacy door, which is locked for take-off and landing, but thereafter can be closed or

Our brand new
A330-900
virgin atlantic
virgin atlantic
1D

opened depending on your preference. If you are in a centre seat (as I was) there is also a central divider which you can raise after take-off to give you privacy from your neighbour.

There are a few storage spaces, including one for shoe stowage (though not for take-off and landing), a small cupboard where the headphones are kept (Virgin refers to this as lockable, which just means it has a latch) and also two more spaces for magazines. The window seat storage is slightly larger than the middle seats – the provided can of water fitted in the window seat storage area, but not in the centre seat's same area.

The IFE is via a 17.3-inch touchscreen, with Bluetooth audio, a do not disturb light and customer-controlled mood lighting. There is wifi supplied through Viasat, which was the fastest I have experienced on board a flight. It was £5.99 for 1-hour or £18.99 for the full flight. You can do PED pairing, meaning you can use your own device to connect to the IFE and browse the entertainment library, control your screen and activate the call bell. You can also use Bluetooth to connect your own headphones, though the ones supplied in Upper Class are of a good quality.

> There is wifi supplied by Viasat, which was the fastest I have experienced on board

**BEST SEATS** Definitely The Retreat if you are a couple and happy to pay extra. If that's not available, then go for a pair of centre seats. For the window seats I'd avoid the back row because the bar area (called The Loft) is there, and might get noisy if you want to sleep during the day.

**THE FLIGHT** The flight was incident free with the seat belt sign coming on only a few times for light turbulence.

After take-off you can use the communal area – The Loft – at the back of the Upper Class cabin. It has banquette seating with seatbelts, and a maximum capacity of eight (or four if seat belts are required).

For the meal service there was a choice of starters: chicken parfait with an apricot chutney and crostini, or textures of beetroot with a goat's cheese mousse, served with a selection of artisan breads. The main course choices were chicken and wild mushroom pie with colcannon mash, garden vegetables and a red wine sauce; miso and sesame-crusted salmon with sweet potato purée, bok choi and a honey and ginger sauce; or vegetable korma with Gujarati beans, jeera pilau rice and paratha. The vegetarian option (korma) was delicious – not too spicy, lots of flavours, and not too heavy. I'm a fan of curries on planes, and this was very tasty.

After a few hours I asked the flight attendants to prepare the seat for sleep, which involves a comfortable padded white undersheet placed over the seat, and a duvet on top. Once fully reclined the seat is comfortable but a little tight, especially in the footwell, but also around your shoulders, since the armrests are fixed. For larger flyers the tight space might be uncomfortable, and for tall flyers there isn't quite enough room to bend your knees when lying down. (On the return overnight flight I slept for the majority of the flight, though others fared less well.)

The waist seat belts are also too short – several colleagues had to ask for an extension just for take-off and landing. There is also an over-the-shoulder belt to be worn for take-off and landing.

Before landing there was a choice of light bites, including: scones with cream, a fish finger sandwich, or chickpea fritter and vegetable samosa.

**ARRIVAL** We arrived on time and were greeted by well-wishers and press, before having a press conference with Richard Branson, Shai Weiss and local dignitaries. I didn't have any checked luggage so after that we were quickly on our way into Tampa.

**VERDICT** This is a well-thought-out version of the Thompson Vantage XL seat. I was impressed with the design, IFE technology, power options and also the speed of the wifi. The service was exemplary. *Tom Otley*

---

**Watch Tom here:**
**youtu.be/lYPGQImwEr8**

**FLIGHT TIME**
10 hours and 10 minutes

**CONFIGURATION**
1-2-1

**SEAT WIDTH**
19.2 inches

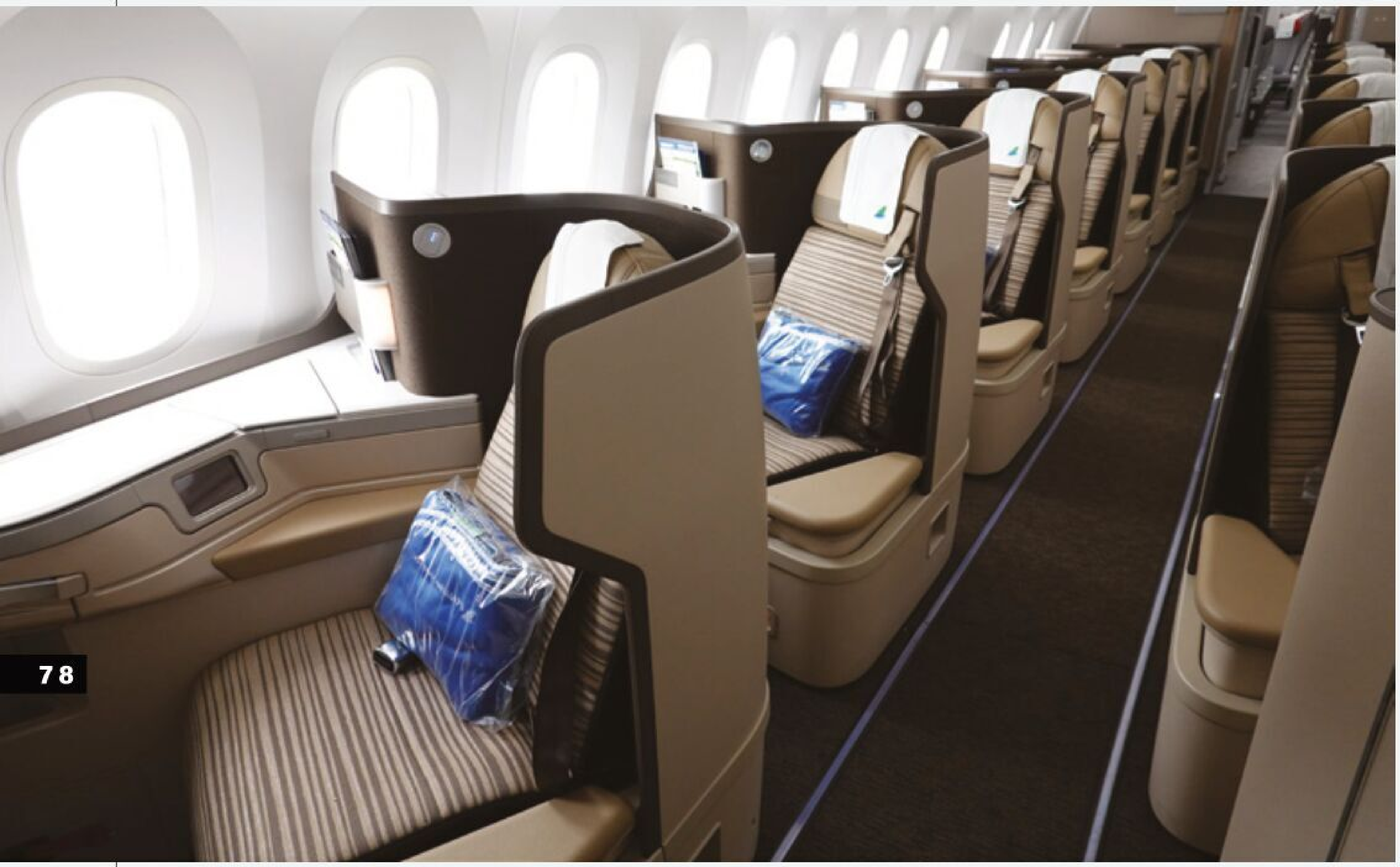
**SEAT RECLINE/BED LENGTH**
180 degrees/76 inches

**PRICE**
Internet rates for a one-way
Upper Class London Heathrow-Tampa flight in
February started from £4,600

**CONTACT**
virginatlantic.com

# Bamboo Airways B787-9 business class

## HANOI–LONDON



ANDREI EFIMKIN

**BACKGROUND** Bamboo Airways is a private airline that launched in 2017 and has quickly expanded, with domestic flights to 21 out of Vietnam's 22 airports and an increasing roster of international services such as London and Sydney. Its long-haul routes are served with a small fleet of B787 Dreamliners, which were originally intended for Hainan Airways.

The airline launched weekly flights between London Heathrow and Hanoi in March – this is a review of the return flight. The outbound flight review is available on businesstraveller.com, and there are video reviews of both on our YouTube channel.

On October 29, the carrier suspended the Hanoi-London Heathrow route, launching a Hanoi-Gatwick service instead. Ho Chi Minh City-Gatwick flights also launched in December.

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS** I arrived at Hanoi's Noi Bai International airport at midnight for the 0215 departure on QH23, a flight time of 11 hours and 25 minutes. There was a long queue at the economy check-in but, thankfully, the premium queue was much shorter and we were quickly checked in. To get airside you have your passport and boarding card inspected at check-in, just before security, and then again just after security, though there were only a few passengers around at this time so it didn't take long. Shoes and watches have to be removed for security.

**LOUNGE** Business class passengers have access to the Song Hong lounge, which is shared with many airlines but is a good size and wasn't full during my visit. It had a range of hot and cold food, soft drinks and alcohol including spirits and wine.

**BOARDING** It was a long walk out to Gate 36, even with automatic walkways, and once we got there boarding had already started (this was around 0130). Once on board, I was guided to my seat and my jacket was taken and hung in the forward wardrobe.

**THE SEAT** Bamboo has two different business class seats on its long-haul B787 aircraft. On the flight over I experienced the Safran Cirrus seat, while on this return flight it was a different business class cabin featuring the Collins Aerospace Super Diamond – the same seat used by British Airways in its new Club Suite, as well as Etihad Airways.

The cabin starts at row 11 and goes back to row 19 in a 1-2-1 (A D-G-K) configuration for a total of 26 seats, with all seats having direct aisle access.

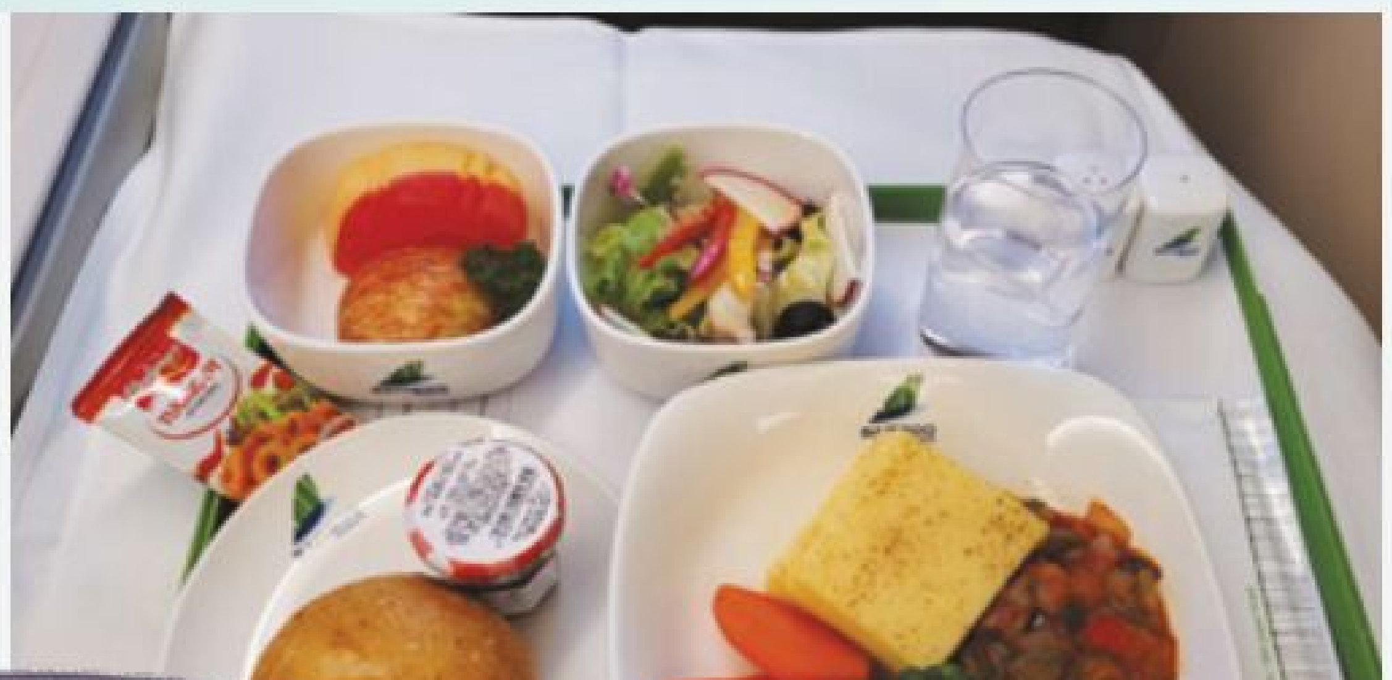
The seat has plenty of storage space, from the large armrest on the aisle to the side table with a flap that can be opened to reveal the AC power, USB and handheld control for the inflight entertainment (IFE) as well as more storage. There is a small compartment by your feet, plus more room under the footrest. Finally there is room for some magazines.

> The bed is a long one – around two metres, but is a little narrow

The seat has a built-in control panel with various pre-sets. It works well and is not in the way, so you won't accidentally touch the controls.

The IFE screen is a good size (18 inches) and needs to be large because it is fixed and facing you directly as you sit in the seat. As with the flight over, the choice of IFE was poor. The table is tucked away under the IFE screen and has several positions which can be manipulated using a lever underneath to bring it closer. It is also bifold, so you can use it in several different ways.

Note that there is a shoulder strap which should be used for both take-off and landing. It is necessary because you are facing forward, but in an angled way, and the surround of the seat in front is close enough for you to hit your head on it in the event of, well, let's say sudden deceleration. Despite this, the flight attendants seemed unaware of it – we were not told to use them, and very few people did, either for take-off or landing at Heathrow.



BAMBOO AIRWAYS

**BEST SEATS** They are all good. I was in the front row window seat 11K, but wasn't disturbed by the galley or the toilet, which is on the other side by the door to the flight deck. If you are travelling with someone, go for the centre seats.

**THE FLIGHT** Before take-off we were offered a choice of three soft drinks. I chose a lime juice. There was no offer of Champagne or sparkling wine, and in fact there wasn't any on board. We received a substantial amenity bag with all the usual items – all wrapped in plastic, unfortunately.

After take-off our orders were taken for both drinks and food. There was a choice of two white wines and two reds: a sauvignon blanc from New Zealand, a chardonnay from France, a merlot from Chile and a shiraz from Australia. The menus were shown to us on an ipad, which makes environmental sense, but it does mean it's difficult to remember exactly what was on offer.

There seemed to be a choice between a Western and Vietnamese menu, though I had pre-ordered a vegan main. This was not very tasty and I left most of it. I spoke to colleagues on the flight and they were also disappointed with their meals, which contrasts to the meals served on the flight out of Heathrow – strange as an airline's meals are normally best out of its home base.

My main course was two pieces of bread, which at first I mistook for large slabs of tofu, with some ratatouille. There was also a salad, a small fruit bowl with single, thick slices of orange, apple and melon, a bread roll and a pot of jam. The meal service included draping a table cloth over the table.

My main aim for the flight was to get some sleep, so I was looking forward to trying out the seat and asked a flight attendant to make the bed. This involves placing a brown undersheet on the bed, which loops over the headrest to keep it in place. With the addition of a small, Bamboo Airways-branded pillow and a comfortable blue blanket I had no problem getting settled.

You can lower the large armrest on the aisle for more room around the shoulders, or keep it raised if you like the security. The bed is a long one – around two metres, but is a little narrow if you like lying on your side. There was a fault on my seat in that it didn't go completely flat – getting stuck perhaps five degrees away from that, but I could still sleep in that position.

I woke after about six hours and saw we were scheduled to arrive well over an hour early – at around 0845 as opposed to 1010.

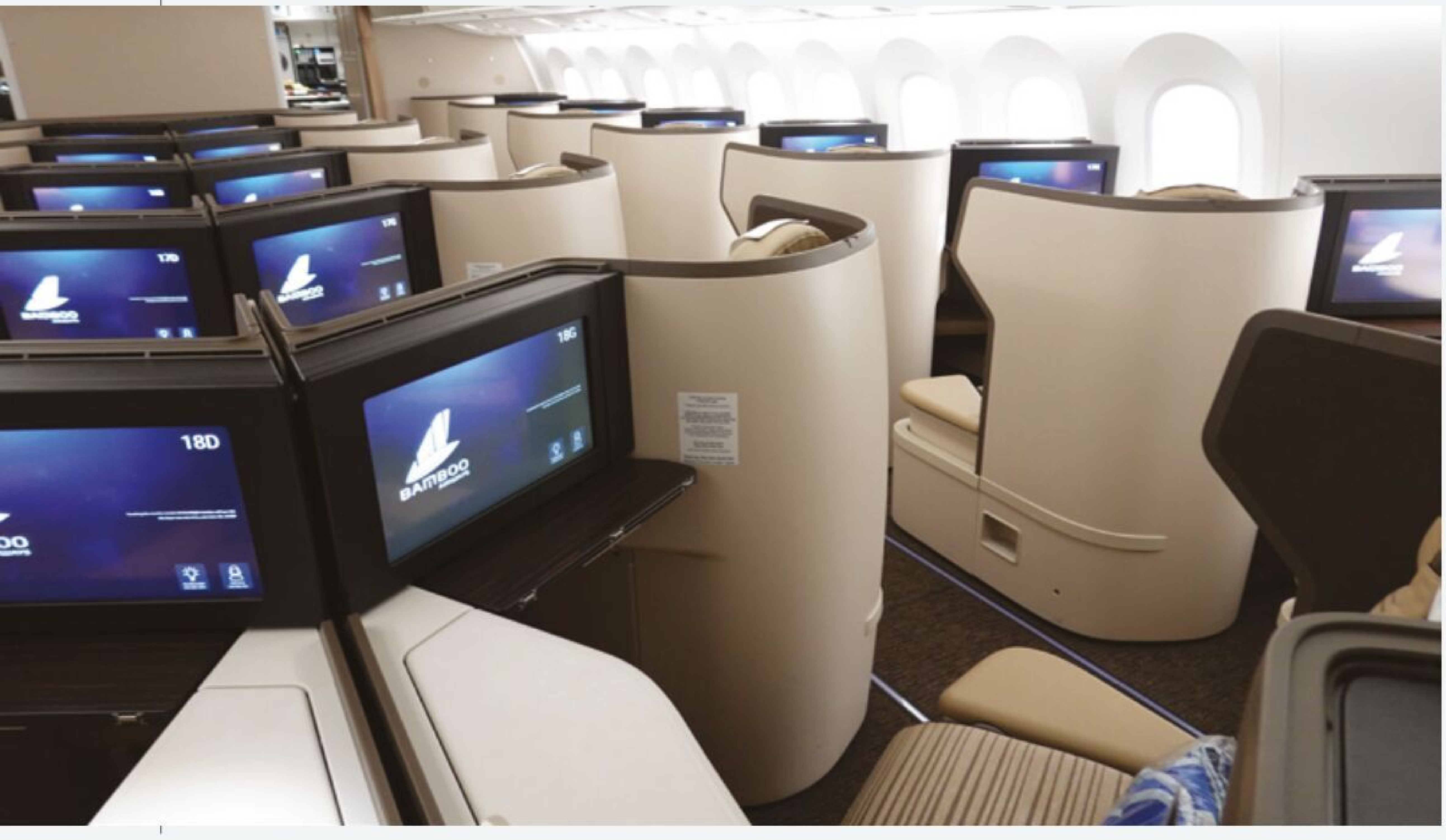
I worked for a while and was offered a pot noodle as a snack, which was just what I needed. Breakfast came with the same three pieces of fruit and the same ratatouille, though this time with pasta, which was odd for breakfast. The coffee was good though, I had it with condensed milk – Vietnamese style.

> I had pre-ordered a vegan main. This was not very tasty and I left most of it

**ARRIVAL** We arrived at 0845, some 80 minutes early, but then waited over an hour for a stand. We disembarked around 1000 and were quickly through immigration, but then the bags took 45 minutes to arrive. I finally left the airport around 1115, some two-and-a-half hours after landing.

**VERDICT** A comfortable flight with a top class seat, great service and a modern aircraft. The food could be better, and so could the choice of inflight entertainment, but otherwise, very much recommended.
*Tom Otley*

**Watch Tom here:**
**youtu.be/2tC3PZd3sMY?t=314**



**FLIGHT TIME**
11 hours and 25 minutes

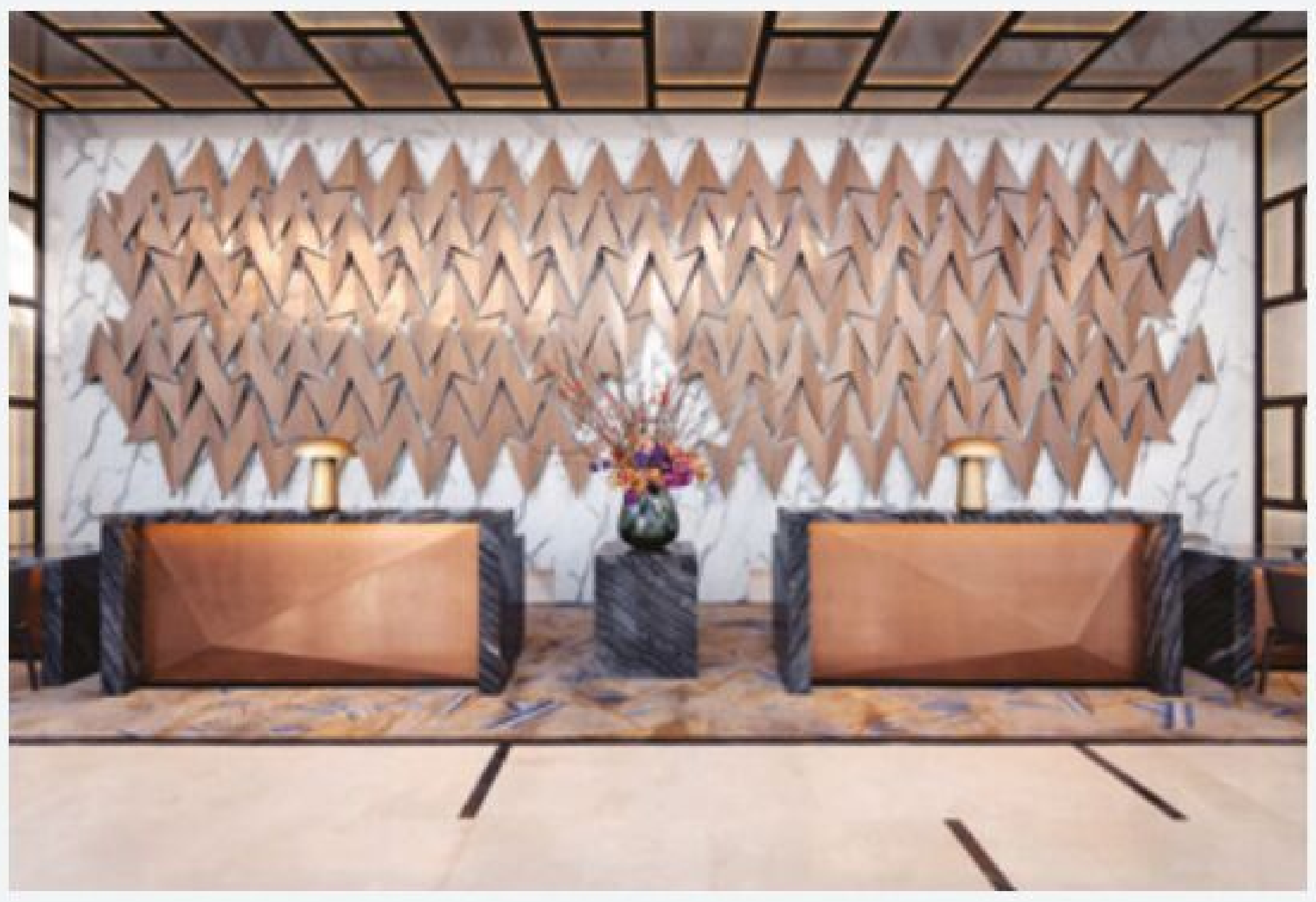
**CONFIGURATION**
1-2-1

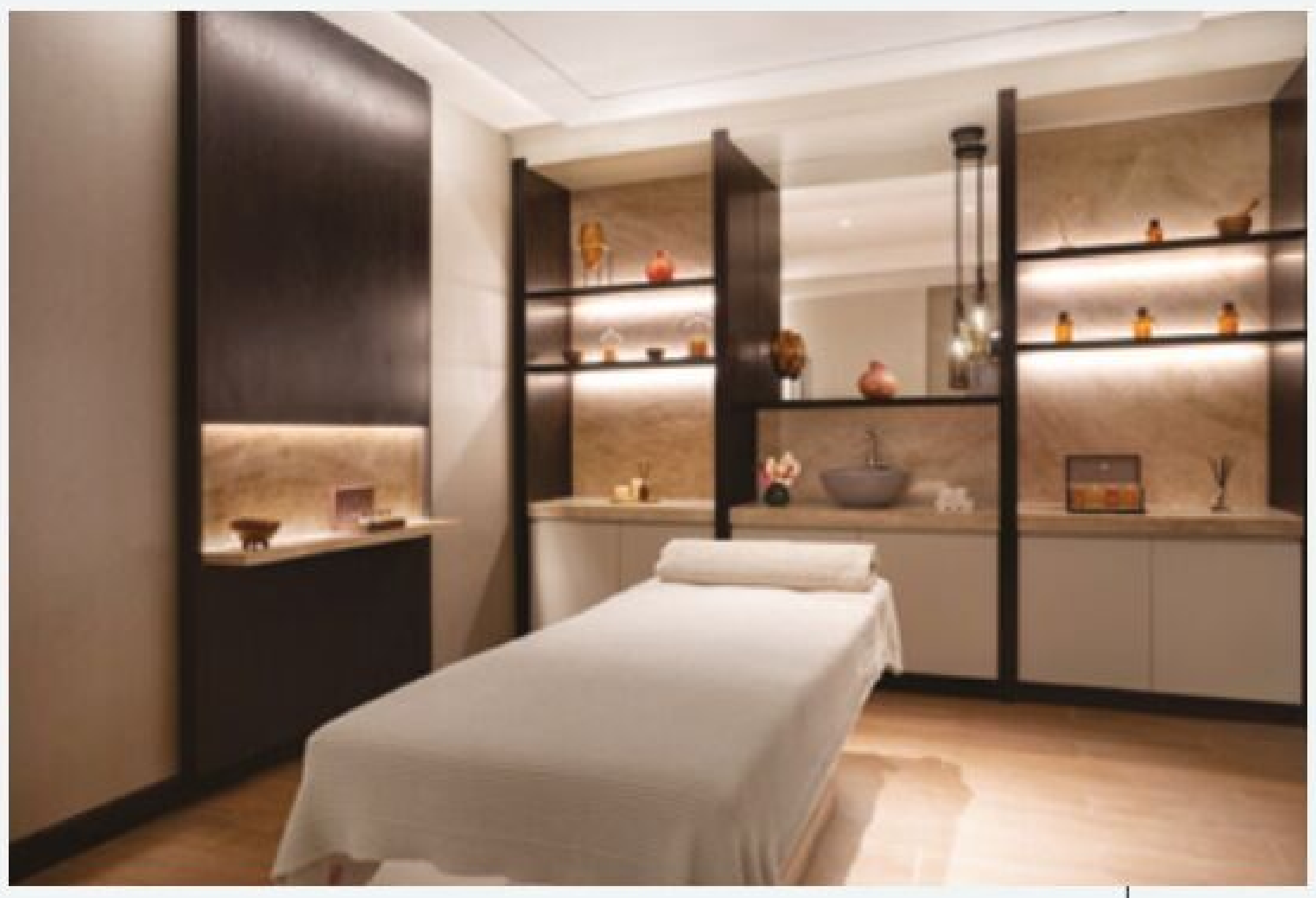
**SEAT WIDTH**
21 inches

**BED LENGTH**
79 inches

**PRICE**
Internet rates for a one-way business class Hanoi-Gatwick flight in February start from £1,342

**CONTACT**
bambooairways.com





# The David Kempinski, Tel Aviv

**BACKGROUND** The David Kempinski, which opened in April 2022, takes its name not from the Biblical David, but from David Taic – the father of Henry Taic, who owns the property through his Nahal Group along with 28-storey residential tower the David Promenade Residences next door (dpresidences.co.il).

**WHERE IS IT?** On Hayarkon Street, a busy thoroughfare that runs parallel to the beach and is also home to the Sheraton and Hilton, with many embassies close by.

**WHAT'S IT LIKE?** Very tall (34-storeys), very modern, and with lots of glass and design elements. There's a double-height reception and it makes the most of its location with sea views in all the public areas and rooms. Feigin Architects designed the building, with interiors by ARA Design featuring nods to the Bauhaus and International architectural styles found in Tel Aviv – expect to see lots of rectangles, squares and modern art pieces. What warms the place is the staff, who are quick to smile and ready to help – whether offering directions or giving advice on how to get to the train station on the Sabbath (answer: don't go, the trains aren't running).

ALEXANDER MAISTERN

**ROOMS** The hotel has 250 rooms (including 56 suites) on floors 5 to 29. The entry level size is 37 sqm, which includes the Superior, Deluxe, Deluxe Seafront and Deluxe Horizon Lounge rooms, with prices depending on floor and whether you get a full or partial sea view. These rooms have a circular table and chair by the window with plenty of charging points, including USB ports by the bed. Other amenities include Molton Brown toiletries, coffee and tea making facilities, minibar, laptop safe and complimentary wifi. Grand Deluxe rooms are 42 sqm and generally on a higher floor but have more of a city view (no rooms are only a city view – the bank of lifts takes up the back of the building). There are a total of 13 executive suites and 14 special suites (these include the four presidential suites, two royal suites and the three-storey David Penthouse on the 30th floor). The Horizon Lounge executive club is on the 22nd floor and has complimentary breakfast, all-day drinks, snacks, light lunch, evening buffet, and meeting rooms. The balcony has unrivalled views of the sunset over the Mediterranean (hence the name).

> It has one of the best views from an executive lounge in the world

**FOOD AND DRINK** On the ground floor beyond reception is Sereia (mermaid in Portuguese) offering a superb buffet breakfast and all-day dining with a focus on fish. On the way there you'll walk past the Sereia Lounge, featuring a bar counter, shorter menu and pastries. Also on this floor is The Common, a two-in-one bar concept that includes a Cohiba Atmosphere-branded cigar bar as well as Israel's first House of Macallan whisky bar. On the top (34th) floor – though not yet open when I stayed in September – is Cloud 51, with its own pool and bar that is accessible to those in signature suites during the day, with general entrance in the evening and a nightclub feel.

**MEETINGS** The hotel's meeting facilities are on the underground floors with the boardrooms on -1 and the ballroom, which seats 300 for a banquet, on -2. Although the hotel is new, all of these rooms were occupied by a big technology conference during my stay.

**LEISURE** The Okoa spa (11 treatment rooms) and fitness centre are on floor -1 while a stunning pool with seafront views is on the fifth floor. The hotel would be worth the price for access to this alone.

**VERDICT** An outstanding new hotel on the beachfront, with excellent service and one of the best views from an executive lounge in the world. *Tom Otley*

**BEST FOR**
Five star luxury in an idyllic seafront location

**DON'T MISS**
An evening drink in the Horizon Club at sunset

**PRICE**
Internet rates for a flexible midweek stay in February started from US$630 for a Superior room

**CONTACT**
51 Hayarkon Street, Tel Aviv-Yafo;
tel: +972-3-776-8888; kempinski.com

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# Fraser Suites Harmonie Paris La Défense

**BACKGROUND** Fraser Suites is an extended-stay brand from Singapore-based serviced apartment and residence company Frasers Hospitality. This Paris property opened in 2004 and was followed by the Le Claridge property in 2006 – see our review at businesstraveller.com.

**WHERE IS IT?** On the outskirts of Paris in La Défense, the city's business district. It's at the eastern end of the district, opposite the motorway (A14) connecting the western suburbs to the city, and a couple of minutes' walk from the Esplanade de La Défense metro station (Line 1). Guests can reach the hotel by taking the Passerelle de l'Aigle footbridge and following the signs to Fraser Suites, which is down some stairs and on the immediate left.

**WHAT'S IT LIKE?** The property is in a large white block with translucent blue balconies, and is part of a cluster of high-rise hotels and serviced apartments, with a Citadines directly behind it and an Ibis and Novotel next door. As the entrance is beneath the footbridge, it's quite shabby and deserted. The aparthotel feels very secure, however, with a keycard-operated gate. This takes you into a landscaped garden, with a small bridge to the front door.

The narrow lobby features a reception straight ahead, with a quiet lounge to the left and the bar/breakfast room and business corner to the right. Check-in is from 2pm and check-out at 12pm. There is a 24-hour complimentary laundrette on the first floor, with washing powder already built-in.

**ROOMS** The 134 apartments are in three categories: 38 sqm Studio Deluxe, 50 sqm One Bedroom Deluxe and 70 sqm Two-Bedroom Deluxe apartment. All apartments feature green and blue furnishings and include well-equipped kitchens with a microwave oven, Nespresso coffee machine (with pods), kettle (with teabags), toaster, induction hob, a small dishwasher, complimentary soft drinks, and a glass bottle of filtered water. Amenities include a safe, iron and ironing board, umbrella, hairdryer, L'Occitane products, and a toothbrush and toothpaste.

> Most apartments have balconies, providing plenty of natural light

The configurations of apartments differ but my One-Bedroom Deluxe apartment was very spacious, with a decent-sized bedroom, a small galley kitchen, a separate toilet, bathroom with a hand-held shower over the bath, and a large living area with a dining table, desk and sofa with a coffee table facing a flatscreen TV. Most apartments have balconies, providing plenty of natural light, though these are a little run-down.

The apartments are well-designed for work, with an ergonomic swivel office chair and lime green desks with built-in UK and European plug sockets and two USB points.

There are signs about sustainability, but nowhere to recycle my goods. I put them in a separate bag and told the cleaners, but they just put them in the bin.

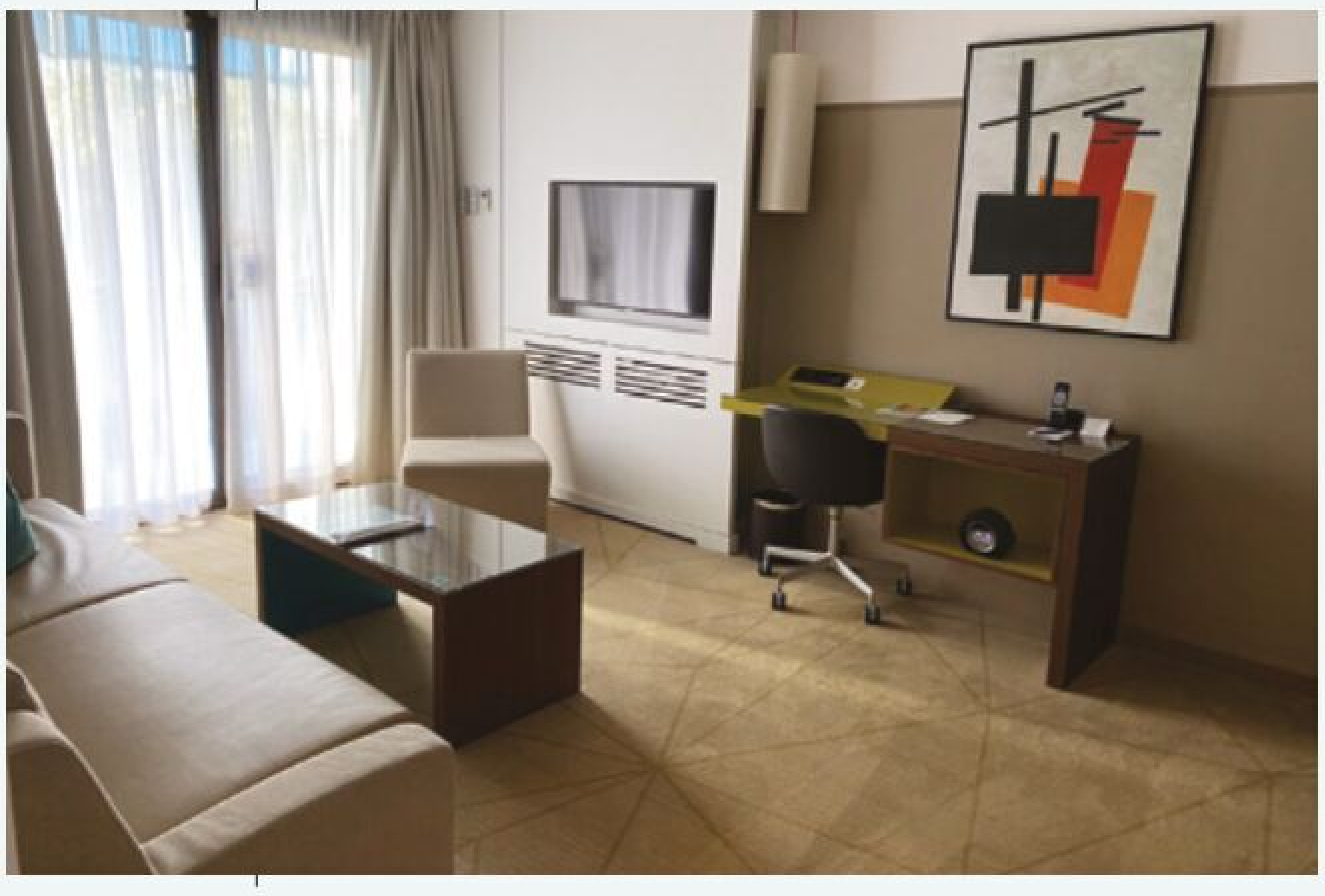
My apartment's air conditioning unit was broken and despite putting a 'do not disturb' sign on my door, I was interrupted during a work call, with staff telling me I should have departed (this was not the case).

**FOOD AND DRINK** A buffet breakfast is served daily from 6.30am-10.30am (7am-11am on weekends) on the ground floor, which is also home to Harmonie Bar (open 6.30pm-11pm). The buffet costs €20 per adult and takeaways can be arranged for €12 the night before. There's a filtered water machine for refilling in-room glass bottles.

**MEETINGS** A business corner includes a Mac and complimentary printing services.

**LEISURE** There is a small 24-hour gym on the ground floor, to the right of the lifts.

**VERDICT** This property is in a good location, with great amenities for working, though some of the tech needs to be fixed.
*Hannah Brandler*



**BEST FOR**
Financial industry travellers in need of a spacious and functional apartment for work

**DON'T MISS**
A lunchtime stroll admiring the contemporary public art amid the high-rise towers

**PRICE**
Internet rates for a flexible midweek stay in February started from €200 for a Studio Deluxe

**CONTACT**
6 Boulevard de Neuilly, 92400, Paris;
+33 (0)1 55 23 26 26; frasershospitality.com

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It’s simple to set up your Retreev smart tag: just attach it to your item of luggage like a traditional tag (it’s made of lightweight, hard-wearing plastic), then scan the QR code or tap the NFC symbol with your smartphone or simply head to retreev.com/activate to enter your contact details and unique ID. Your Retreev tag is now activated for life – there’s no subscription fee to pay.

Find out more at **retreev.com**

retreev

# Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi

**BACKGROUND** The Metropole opened in 1901, although it has changed names for substantial periods since then and has been completely rebuilt, albeit in the style of the original hotel, and subsequently expanded. As an example, the 135-room Opera Wing and an office tower were completed in 1996, with the office block converted into guestrooms in 2008, bringing the total to 364 rooms and suites. At present, however, the heritage Metropole Wing is closed until at least 2024 for renovations, and so the room inventory is currently 255. The 'Legend' part of the hotel's title indicates it has an illustrious history, which it certainly does, complete with a bunker under the hotel dating back to the Vietnam War. A free 30-minute hotel history tour is conducted every afternoon at 5pm. It's worth noting there are a lot of stairs in this hotel, and getting from one part of the hotel to another can be cumbersome.

**WHERE IS IT?** In Hanoi's French Quarter and in the heart of the commercial and business district. Noi Bai International airport is a 45-minute drive away.

**WHAT'S IT LIKE?** Very traditional. Dark wood floors, rotating ceiling fans, liveried staff and lots of prints displaying fascinating stories from the past and famous former guests. There are two lobbies, though the Opera Wing lobby is the one (mainly) being used while renovations are ongoing. There are two banks of lifts either side of a stairway, though as one of these is for staff, you can sometimes wait quite a while. There are seven floors in the Opera Wing, with the Executive Floor at the top.

**ROOMS** I was in a Premium room in the Opera Wing (32 sqm). The rooms need refurbishing, unfortunately. There are no USB charging ports and a power point on only one side of the bed. There was also no coffee machine, just sachets of Nescafe and teabags. On the plus side, the light switches were simple to operate with easily controllable master switches. There was also a sizeable desk for working, a walk-in wardrobe, and the windows could be opened (after deactivating the child lock). The rooms have air conditioning, but it was very slow to chill the room. The small bathroom had a shower accessed by stepping into the bath, but there were full-size Balmain toiletries on the wall. Executive rooms get access to the executive lounge also on the seventh floor, but compared to most executive lounges it is very nineties in both design and offering, though I liked the atmosphere created by the pianist in the evening.

> A bunker under the hotel dates back to the Vietnam War

**FOOD AND DRINK** The hotel has an outstanding arsenal of restaurants and bars, and ironically, the refurbishment of these venues showcases what the hotel could be if it was thoroughly updated. Le Beaulieu offers French gastronomy in a gorgeous room, while adjoining it is the Parisian-style pavement bistro La Terrasse for street-side snacks and refreshments. Breakfast in Spices Garden was sub-standard for a hotel of this tier. Angelina, formerly an Italian restaurant, now serves Australian and US food and has an impressive double-height bar. The Bamboo Bar by the pool is quiet, relaxing and feels like you could be at a resort instead of in the middle of the city.

**MEETINGS** There is a conference and business centre on the upper ground floor of the Opera Wing, with three boardrooms and secretarial services. The hotel also has larger event spaces, including Thang Long Hall (catering to 120), L'Orangerie and the 100 sqm garden Le Balcon.

**LEISURE** The Le Spa du Metropole has eight rooms decorated in "Indochine" style (treatments start from around US$95 for one hour). The SoFit gym is open 7am-11pm but to get there you have to take a lift down to the lobby, walk past the restaurants and meeting facilities, back outside and then finally enter the spa – not easy in slippers and a robe. The outdoor pool is an idyllic setting.

**VERDICT** This hotel has an enviable history, but new renovations would be welcome. Until then there is the nostalgia and excellent service, as well as Le Beaulieu restaurant. *Tom Otley*

**BEST FOR**

A meal at the refurbished Le Beaulieu restaurant

**DON'T MISS**

The complimentary tour of the hotel's bomb shelter

**PRICE**

Internet rates for a Premium room with breakfast in mid-February start from US$375 including tax and surcharges

**CONTACT**

15 Ngo Quyen Street, Hoan Kiem District, 10000 Hanoi; +84 24 3826 6919; sofitel.com

VIET NGUYEN

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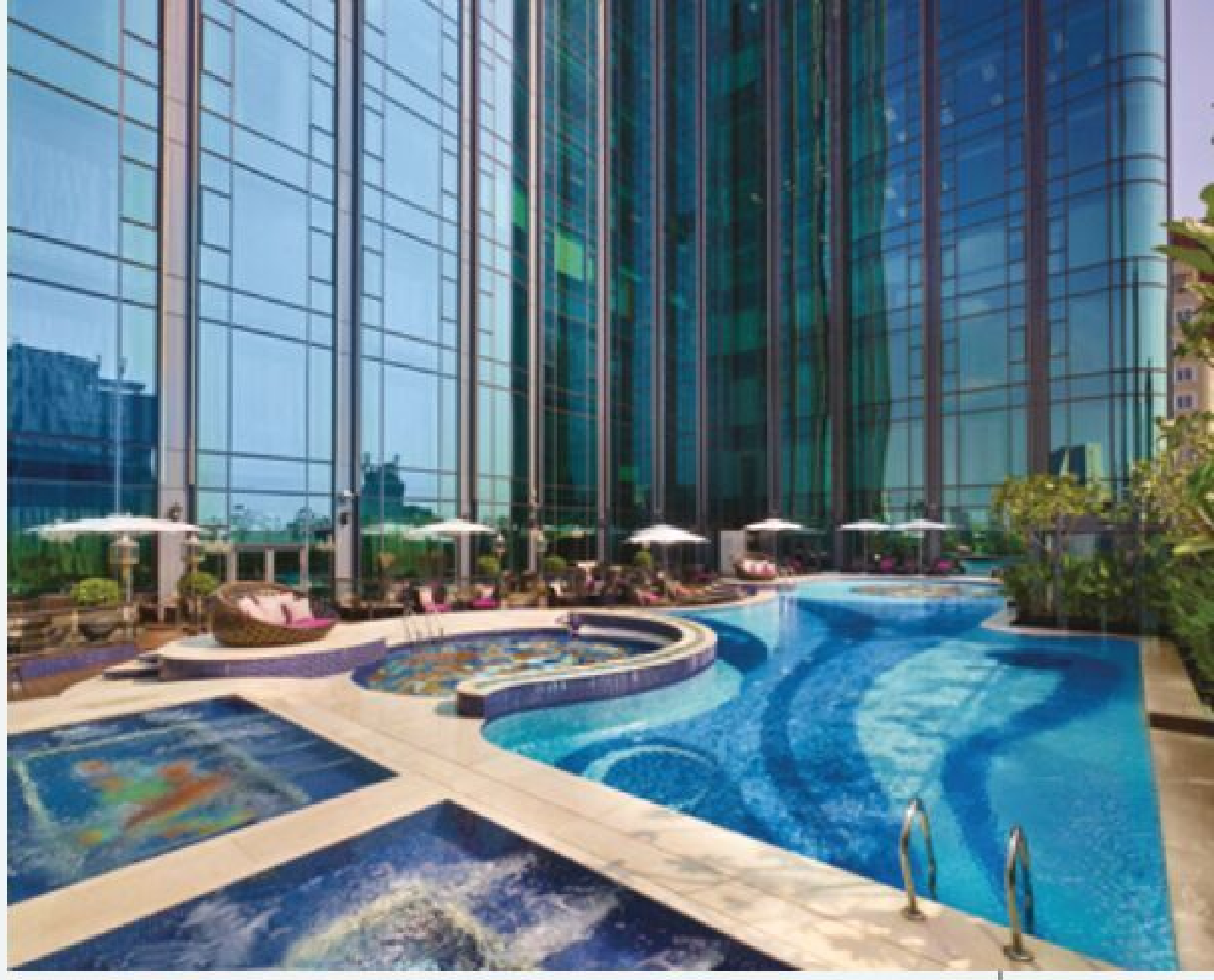


# The Reverie Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City

**BACKGROUND** The Reverie occupies the upper floors of a 39-storey mixed-use building – Times Square – containing luxury showrooms and offices. It opened in 2015.

**WHERE IS IT?** On Dong Khoi Street and Nguyen Hue Boulevard in Ho Chi Minh City's central urban area - District 1.

**WHAT'S IT LIKE?** From reception on the ground floor you are quickly whisked to the seventh floor lobby for check-in. It's an opulent space created almost exclusively by Italian designers. Reception has pale blue carpeting, walls of white-grey marble with multicoloured mosaics, and a five-metre 'Esmeralda' sofa designed by Colombostile upholstered in purple ostrich leather with amethyst detailing. There's a malachite and gold-plated clock weighing 1,000 kilograms by Florentine company, Baldi. There are crystal chandeliers, liveried staff and a baby grand piano in the corner with a live pianist. It's a level of ostentatiousness that will either beguile or amuse, depending on your taste.

**ROOMS** There are 286 rooms and suites, with 12 categories of rooms ranging in size from 43-53 sqm and 62 suites ranging from 63 sqm to 313 sqm. All are extremely luxurious with floor-to-ceiling windows, robes and bed sheets by Frette, complimentary minibar including beers, a Nespresso machine and kettle, and Chopard toiletries. The rooms are perfect for those on business – a good-sized desk and office supplies including scissors, glue, pens and paper. On the technology side there are Cisco VoIP telephones, 46- to 55-inch Samsung LED FHD TVs (with 15-inch TVs in the bathrooms), complimentary wifi and all-in-one media hubs for optimal connectivity – including universal power outlets, USB and HDMI outlets, and audio and video inputs. There is a 542 sqm executive club on the top two floors of the hotel called The Reverie Lounge reserved for those in suites.

**FOOD AND DRINK** There are four restaurants. Café Cardinal is the all-day dining restaurant serving breakfast through to contemporary French cuisine in the evening. It's an odd space, reached by a curving staircase down from the reception area, with a double-height ceiling that makes it feel empty even when quite busy, but the food is excellent under chef Paul Pettini and his team. The Royal Pavilion serves Cantonese fine dining in a setting decorated with jade stones and traditional Chinese scenes painted on gold leaf that are juxtaposed with chairs and tableware designed by Provasi of Italy. Da Vittorio Saigon offers Italian fine-dining with exemplary service in the basement of the hotel. There is also The Long at Times Square, which is a casual restaurant with a 48m bar – it is actually a walkway between two streets but thankfully covered.

> It's a level of ostentatiousness that will either beguile or amuse you

**MEETINGS** There are 15 different sized rooms on the 4th, 5th and 8th floors. The largest is the La Scala ballroom, with onyx-framed entryways, fabric-lined walls by Rubelli, and Swarovski crystal chandeliers, while the foyer features a 19th-century Bechstein grand piano with a 'Russian mosaic' veneer of malachite and gilded bronze by Baldi.

**LEISURE** There is a 24m outdoor pool on the sixth floor complete with an underwater sound system as well as two spa baths. On the same level the 1,200 sqm fitness centre and spa has curved corridors of slatted walnut featuring 12 treatment rooms, male and female steam and sauna facilities, a beauty salon and hair salon.

**VERDICT** The decor may not be to everyone's taste, but this is a luxury hotel with top class service and fantastic facilities, including excellent restaurants. *Tom Otley*

**BEST FOR**

The views across Ho Chi Minh City

**DON'T MISS**

Dining in one of the restaurants – if you only choose one – try Da Vittorio Saigon

**PRICE**

Internet rates for a Deluxe room in mid-February start from US$350

**CONTACT**

Times Square Building, 22-36 Nguyen Hue Boulevard and 57-69F Dong Khoi Street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City; +84 (0) 28 3823 6688; thereveriesaigon.com

MATTHEWSHAW.CO.UK

# *Our guide to...* Airport lounges at Gatwick South Terminal

Airports are busy, airlines are advising arriving early, and some lounges have yet to reopen. Here is our round-up of the current situation with lounges at Gatwick South Terminal.
We provided an update on lounges in Gatwick airport's North Terminal in the November issue of *Business Traveller*.

## THE REGUS EXPRESS BUSINESS LOUNGE – LANDSIDE

(This lounge is temporarily closed)
**Where is it?** Landside in the South Terminal Arrivals area. Take the lift next to Costa Coffee down to the ground floor. This lounge is before you go through security, so make sure you leave the lounge with plenty of time to get through security and to your gate.
**Who can use it?** Travellers with premium tickets and membership cards or Regus memberships. No children are allowed.
**What's it like?** Fully-equipped with business facilities, wifi, tea, coffee and snacks. If you are flying you might like to get through security before settling down to do some work – but if you've landed and need to work, or you know your flight is delayed or cancelled, this lounge would be a useful choice – if it was open. There are also 11 private meeting rooms (book in advance) for up to 12 people, shower facilities and printers available for an extra charge.
**Dress code?** Smart casual, so no fancy dress, replica sports kits, revealing clothing or offensive slogans.
**Price?** Temporarily closed.
**Opening times:** Usually 7am-6pm Monday to Friday..
*regus.com*

## NO1 LOUNGE

**Where is it?** On the upper floor of the main airside shopping area. After you've been through security, follow signs for No1 Lounges. Go down the corridor between Dixons and JD Sports to find the entrance.
**Who can use it?** Paid access for all checked-in passengers. Premium passengers flying with Aer Lingus, Air Malta, Tunisair, Air Baltic, Air Europa, Croatia Airlines, TAP Air Portugal and Turkish Airlines can gain access by showing their boarding pass. Cardholders from Wexas, IOU, Lounge Club, Priority Pass, Dragonpass, Lounge Key and Diners Club are also accepted.
**What's it like?** The lounge has complimentary food and drink (one hot dish and glass of Champagne per person), wifi, charging points, private meeting room (book in advance) and runway views. There's a tended bar and a TV and lounge area, as well as a library area for over 12s.
**How long can I stay?** Up to three hours before your flight departure time. You can buy extra time on the day or in advance if you'd like. You can leave and return to the lounge during your visit but you must take your luggage with you.
**Dress code?** Smart casual, which means no tracksuits (you can change into your comfortable flight wear on the way out), no replica sports kits, caps, slogans which might cause offence, clothing which exposes bellies and thighs or bare shoulders for men. No fancy dress or onesies either.
**Price?** £34 per adult online.
**Opening times:** 5am-8pm.
*no1lounges.com*

## CLUBROOMS LOUNGE

**Where is it?** After security follow the signs for Lounges and it's between Dixons and JD Sports. You'll see the No1 Lounge reception – Clubrooms is the top tier of No1 Lounges.
**Who can use it?** Paid access for checked-in passengers over the age of 12 from any airline and any ticket class. Some premium tickets will get you in for free, so check with your airline. Priority Pass, Lounge Key and Dragonpass cardholders can use the lounge but will need to pay an additional fee of £10.
**What's it like?** This is the premium version of the No1 Lounges, so you'll get at-seat waiter service, with seasonal menus featuring local produce. There's a fully stocked bar serving complimentary alcohol and soft drinks – and if you book online there's a Champagne package for an extra £10.
**How long can I stay?** Up to three hours before your flight departure time. You can buy extra hours on the day. You can leave and return as often as you like during your booking but you must take your luggage with you.
**Dress code?** Smart casual, which means no tracksuits or flip flops, baseball caps or replica sports kit, no offensive slogans or revealing clothes – including tank tops, crop tops, short skirts and shorts. And no fancy dress.
**Price?** From £38 online.
**Opening times:** The Clubroom Lounges at North and South Terminals Gatwick Airport were temporarily closed at the time of writing. *no1lounges.com*

## MY LOUNGE

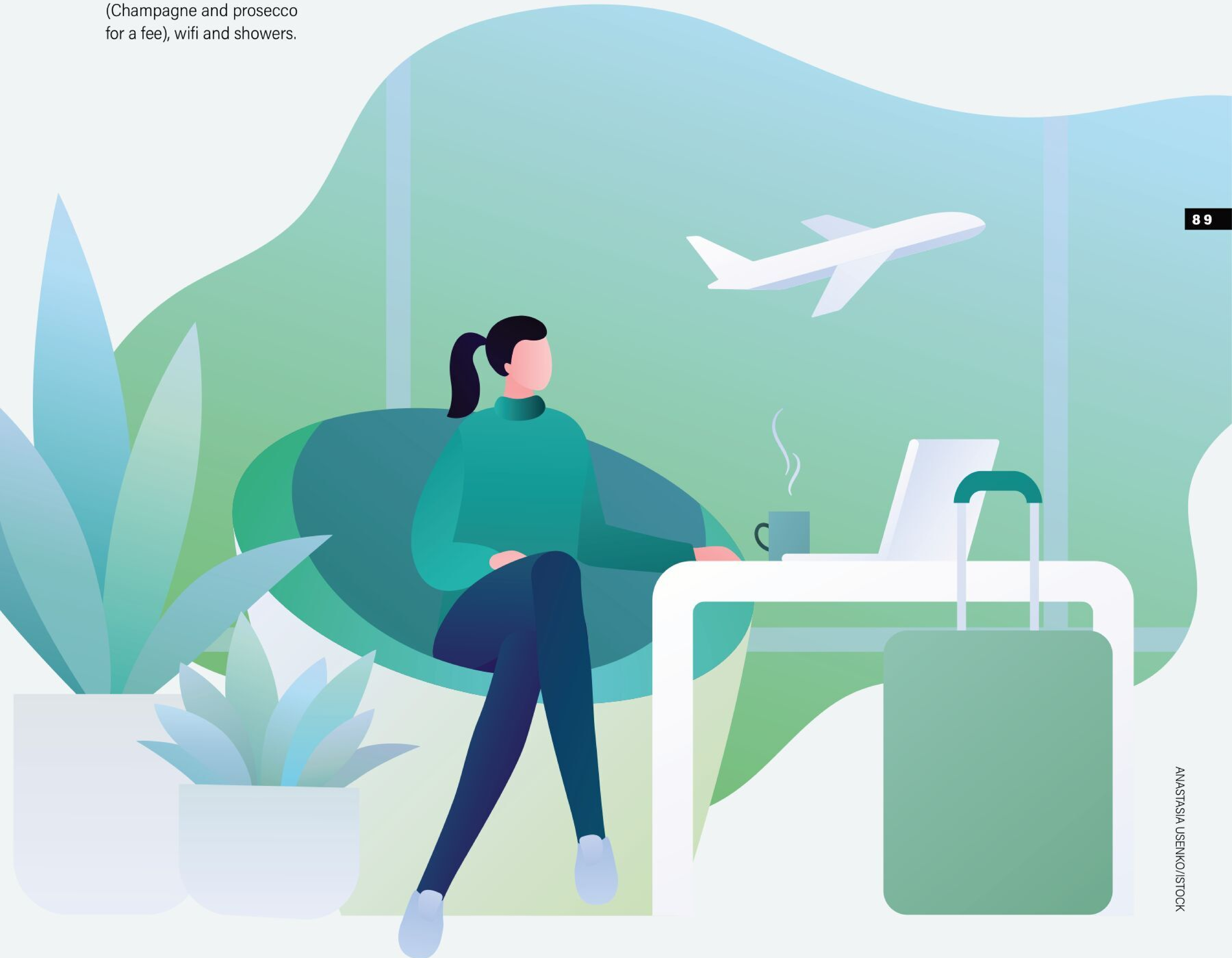
(This lounge is temporarily closed)
**Where is it?** Once through security follow the signs for Airport Lounges and My Lounge. You'll find it on the upper level of the departure area.
**Who can use it?** Anyone can pay to get in. Some premium tickets grant you free access so check with your airline. Priority Pass, DragonPass and Lounge Key cardholders get in free.
**What's it like?** Airside with an outdoor terrace so you can be part of the action. The lounge offers free wifi, snacks and drinks including a self service bar and cocktail station.
**How long can I stay?** You can arrive three hours before your departure time.
**Dress code?** Smart casual like the other lounges in the No1 Lounge brand – no replica football kits, tracksuits, caps, camouflage, onesies or clothes which are revealing around the belly or shoulders (for men).
**Price?** Adults from £24. Children under two years old get in free.
**Opening times:** 4am-4pm except on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday when it closes at 3pm.
*no1lounges.com*

### CLUB ASPIRE SOUTH TERMINAL – AIRSIDE

**Where is it?** After security take the escalators or stairs located in the middle of the terminal to Level 1 and turn right. Follow signs for Lounges and the lounge is located between WHSmith and Sunglasses Boutique.
**Who can use it?** Anyone can pay to get in. Diners Club and Priority Pass members get in with their cards. Some premium tickets will get you in free so check with your airline.
**What's it like?** Runway views, complimentary snacks and drinks (Champagne and prosecco for a fee), wifi and showers.
**How long can I stay?** Three hours.
**Dress code?** Smart casual dress at all times (no sportswear, offensive slogans, caps, tracksuits, revealing clothing, onesies allowed).
**Price?** From £17.99
**Opening times:** 5am-9pm.

### BRITISH AIRWAYS LOUNGES SOUTH TERMINAL

**Where are they?** After security don't go down the escalators, instead take a left down a corridor where you will come out by Club Aspire and My Lounge. Cross the mezzanine level and the BA lounges (First and Club) are by the No1 Lounge and Clubrooms.
**Who can use them?** British Airways Gold, Oneworld Sapphire and Emerald tiers. Iberia passengers, and Oneworld equivalent passengers. British Airways first and business class passengers. For full details of who can use each lounge and if you can bring guests, check britishairways.com/lounges.
**What's it like?** The lounges have runway views, a mezzanine level, food and drink including Champagne, plenty of different seating options including booths, a business centre and a kids room with table football. There are showers too.
**How long can I stay?** Until your flight is ready to depart.
**Dress code?** Smart casual – no football kits, tracksuits, baseball caps, revealing clothing, fancy dress or onesies.
**Price?** N/A
**Opening times:** 5am-8pm Monday-Friday. Until 9.30pm on Saturday and 9pm on Sunday.
*Felicity Cousins*



ANASTASIA USENKO/ISTOCK

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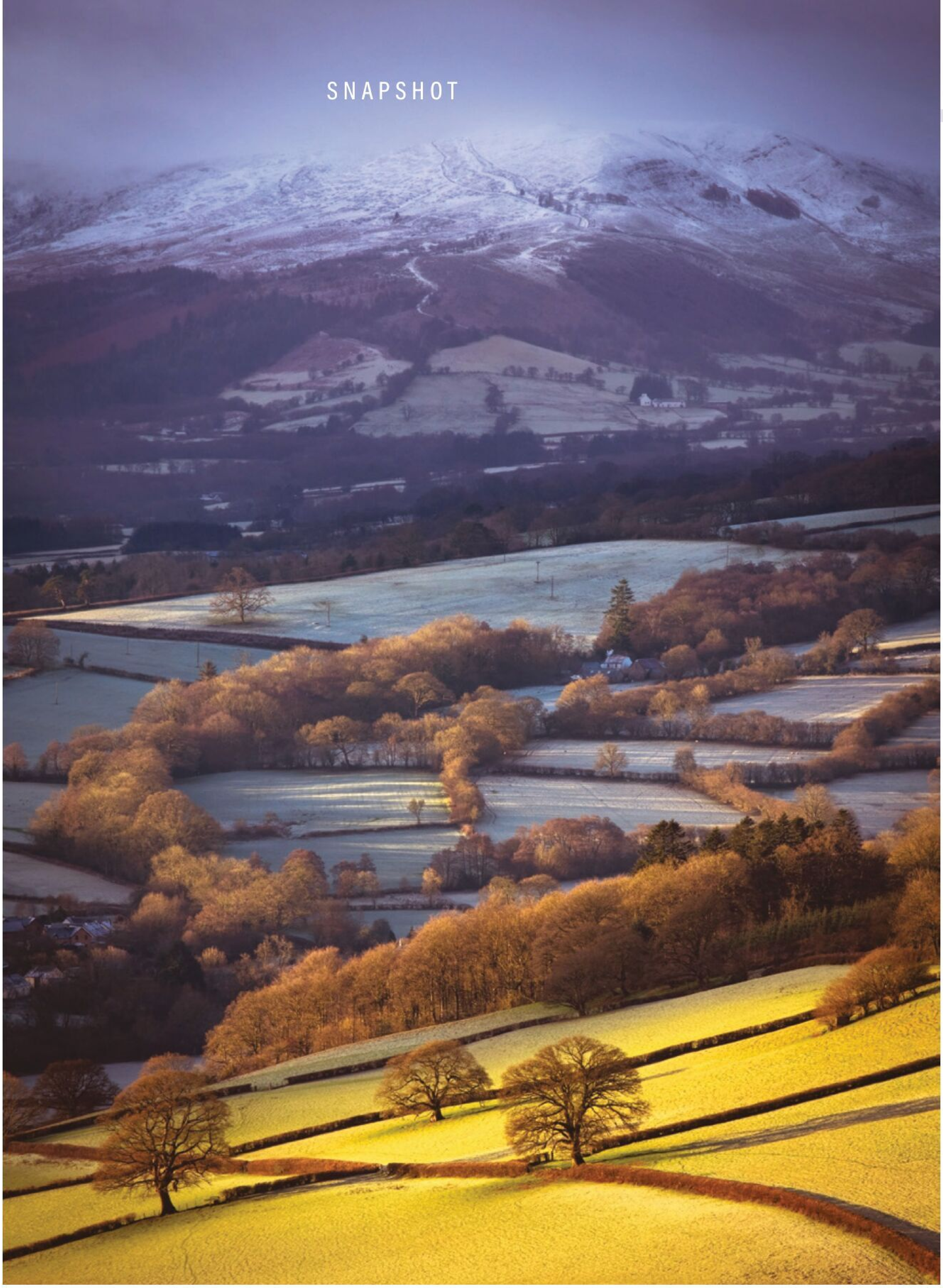

WILL DAVIES

# Fields of gold and snow

The Landscape Photographer of the Year celebrates its 15th anniversary in 2022, showcasing images of the British countryside. Welsh photographer Will Davies was chosen by the judges as the overall winner for his impressive photo entitled 'Brecon in Winter,' taken from the Pen-y-Crug hillfort in December and providing a spectacular vista of Brecon Beacons National Park in Wales. "I love this area in winter – the mountains somehow feel and look grander and wilder in the snow. The weather was not looking promising as I hiked up in the dark, but luckily the sun broke through right at sunrise, just long enough to get this shot," Davies said. The winning and commended images are touring rail stations in the UK in partnership with Network Rail until April 21, 2023. Find out more at *lpoty.co.uk*

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